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Thine is the Power

MARY FRANCES DONER

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Thine Is the Power

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THINE IS THE POWER

MARY FRANCES DONER

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THINE IS THE POWER

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To
Grace Stone Woodbridge,
loyal and true through the years

"Forgive us our trespasses . . ."

Chapter 1

From the top of the hill at the edge of the garden, she looked off across Lake Mohican to where a growing moon sketched silver paths—like life suggesting this road or that one, confusing the spectator whose heart, as in this case, could be an unreliable compass. Just below, on the beach at the foot of the slanting path, was the mass of rocks where she loved to sit at twilight with Solomon, her golden retriever, and watch the night come on.

Now and then someone would stroll along the

sandy shore, whistling as he tossed a pebble across the water. And when the wind was from the west, you could hear the tune.

Down the shore a few miles, the crew of The Great Western Construction Company's Pumped Storage Project worked night and day. Now their dazzling lights tried to vie with the gentler moon. They had brought *him* here, and he was important to them. Bert Lowry, a young genius in engineering, successful, irresistible, and with the kind of personality you accepted at face value. No questions asked, no references or identification necessary. With one smile he settled that. With one kiss he put the torch to reasoning.

She had thought she was sensible, with true instincts and a good head on her shoulders. That's what she had thought. But something had happened to the thinking and the reasoning. Memory poked at the little pile of ashes, for now that was all there was left. . . .

He had talked and she had listened, not with her head but her heart. Great Western was Big Time, but he had his eye on a spot farther up the ladder. He was ambitious, and he would make it, she knew. He would make it with the magic that

had held her captive. He was persuasive and without conscience. She had listened and believed, as she had believed in the loyalty of her closest friend, Audrey Andrews.

Once upon a time, the word "jilted" had been only a word. That had been before Great Western's advent. The spurious, blinding stars on cranes and gigantic earth-moving equipment tried vainly to challenge those in the heavens. It was like a coarse female in the wrong crowd, voice raised crudely above the others.

The Great Western Construction Company had invaded the peace and quiet here on the shore of Lake Mohican, once a carpet for the famous cherry and apple orchards throughout the state, an area of natural beauty heretofore free of the roar and clamor of the outside world. The Pumped Storage Station—an enormous Power Project, a major unit under the aegis of certain national utilities—represented a substantial step in progress, and one of equal magnitude in chaos. And the large corps of workers would eventually leave behind their inevitable effect on the people of Channel City. . . .

Bert Lowry and Audrey Andrews. It was unbe-

lievable, but it had happened. Their elopement had shocked the town. But somehow Nancy had managed to carry on. That was vital. Head up, forced smile, inspired by a piece of lead in the chest called the heart. But hate, it seemed, could provide a certain strength. And it grew and grew until it began to clarify the delusions she had been living with. It had texture. It was an entity in itself, like an invisible giant standing beside her with both feet planted firmly on the ground.

The past was as immediate as if it all had just happened. . . . When had she first confided to Audrey of this thing between her and Bert Lowry? How long ago? And Audrey had said, "Do you expect me to be surprised?" She had a cute way of teasing. "You seemed to want to make it a secret, so I went along. But, you know, I just don't get it. He—he isn't your type—so obvious, so sort of an—exhibitionist."

"Don't say that, Audrey! You don't really know Bert. He's just full of fun—and life. He's not trying to impress anyone. You just don't understand. It's—well, kind of like hypnosis. Wait till it hits you."

And Audrey had shrugged and smiled, And

now, as Nancy thought of it, she realized there had been something about that smile, something . . . How could she have been so blind, so far off in that nimbus of romance? How? *How?*

Not by word or gesture had Audrey betrayed the truth—an expert performance of perfidy. Pals since childhood, trustful sharing of secrets, the admission of a crush on this one, fair interest in another. And then, that helpless admission to Audrey. Yet not by the twitch of an eyebrow had Audrey registered anything but pleasure at her chum's happiness, the truth masked. Anyone but Audrey, *anyone.*

Shock had a way of lasting. It had been over a month now, and Nancy felt as if it had just happened. Early summer could stab and wound with its fragrance and stars and sensuous evenings. Like this one, for instance. Go ahead, rub it in, she said to herself, shrugging as the playful breeze stirred the blonde wig that her mother deplored and her father ignored and Bert had declared was "something else," just as she was. Special. Right in there—and wasn't that a laugh!

Now Solomon, her golden retriever, nuzzled her gently. Solly understood, God love him. And

despite her delicate Chinese brocade sheath, she dropped to her knees and held him and was comforted.

If she hadn't been such a dope, she wouldn't have to face this thing tonight. She would rather be shot than appear at the Club with Boyd Clay. But after what her father had said that night—well, she would never forget the scene that had betrayed her into this. . . .

It had been one of those evenings when the telephone never stopped ringing. That's the way it went in a doctor's house. But the interruptions were handled efficiently by his wife.

Mrs. "Doctor" Winters had been christened Prudence. Seldom are parents blessed with such prescience in the arrival of an heir. Mrs. Winters was practical, blunt, efficient, always neutral, always contained and unemotional. This detached force in the Winters' household was responsible, no doubt, for the close relationship between father and daughter. She was foresighted, wise, shrewd in the management of practical affairs, circumspect, and discreet. Infallibly she made snap judgments.

That particular evening the doctor was tired and troubled. There had been an accident at the Project much earlier, and though his office was in Channel City, he was on call at Great Western since his home was not too far away.

He sighed as the phone rang. Mrs. Winters responded, beckoned Nancy, and was ignored. Always pleasant and courteous, she spoke briefly and hung up.

"That was Boyd Clay," she announced.

"Oh, *no!*" groaned Nancy.

"Don't you even want to know what he said?"

"I couldn't care less."

"He left a message. He wants to take you to the Hendersons' dinner dance at the Club next Thursday."

Nancy leaned forward, anxious. "And you told him—"

"That you'd call him."

"I'm just likely to take in *that* ball game!"

"Wait a minute." The doctor looked up. "What's the matter with Boyd Clay?"

"You've seen him. Isn't that enough?" These days Nancy's tone was never without bitterness.

The evening paper was laid aside. "You're a bit

obvious, Nancy. Everyone knows you're not interested in parties these days—and the reason. But why put down a nice chap like Boyd? He's only being friendly."

"He's pitying me!"

"That isn't the first time he's called you for a date," her mother reminded her.

"Oh, skip it—if you don't mind!"

"But *I* mind!" There were times when that note of authority in Dr. Winters' voice brought everyone to attention. "This is the first time, my girl, I've ever seen you show the white feather."

"And what's that supposed to mean?"

He mused for a moment thoughtfully. "Cowardice."

That did it. "Okay!" In a moment Boyd Clay's number had been reached, his invitation accepted, and the desperate tears handled behind her bedroom door.

But for that wretched evening she wouldn't be standing here now, waiting for Boyd Clay and praying that his car would break down or— But no. There he was now, turning in at the drive, and the ordeal at the Club had to be faced. Her idiotic submission to her father's challenge be-

came an immediate reality. Well, she would see it through somehow. At the Club she would have to face the firing line of smirks from the formerly jealous, of pity from the always compassionate, of curiosity from those never destined to live with excitement. She would face it somehow.

The Club . . . They *would* be playing "The Shadow of Your Smile." Memories, smothering, quickening the heartbeat. Someone had said that people forget. Maybe not forget, but tire of the little sadistic games. People always moved on to more current and perhaps more cruel pastimes. Nothing funnier for them to relish tonight than her arrival with Boyd Clay, the loner, who couldn't always come up with a date.

She made the powder room an excuse to gain time. No escape there.

"Nancy, darling, how wonderful to see you around again! It's been *ages*. . . ." "Where have you kept yourself?" "We thought you had taken the veil." "After all, you could do worse than Boyd Clay. He's always so—understanding."

But, too, there were pleasantly familiar faces from the Power Project there, chaps she had met

through Bert. One of them, Lute Belknap, always the life of the party, had brought his banjo and joined the little orchestra. She knew him fairly well and liked him. He was valuable to the company and next in line to Big Joe Harrison, the Eagle. That's what the gang called Big Joe, a former football star. Of superior talent and judgment, he had been snapped up by Great Western for an important spot in their ranks. The gang called him other things, too, on occasion, for he had a temper like the flames of hell. But he got things done and respected his responsibilities. He could be friendly, even gentle, especially to the victim of an accident on the job. But woe befell the one whose carelessness had been responsible for such an accident.

Seeing Lute now, she remembered that Bert had said, "Lute is next in line to Big Joe Harrison in that spot. That's the guy that calls the turns at Great Western. Nobody talks back to him. Lute's good in his field. He's got to be, with a top boss like Big Joe. And he could step into those outsized shoes without too much trouble."

She had met Big Joe. He had just nodded indif-

ferently. So he was called the Eagle! So you could have him. Quite appropriate, his working on a Power Project. He struck her as being drunk with power.

But Boyd was impressed. He went on praising Big Joe and the tie-up with Lute until Nancy said, "Forget the sales pitch. I'm not buying. He leaves me cold. I met him once."

"I guess girls aren't his dish, either," admitted Boyd, yet he went on building him up, and one could see it was prompted by hero worship. "They call him the Eagle because the company gives him a plane—he covers other projects for the company. Great Western has a big network of projects."

As Nancy and Boyd danced past the grinning Lute, he whipped through a double glissando on the banjo and called out to her, "Hi, Beautiful! *Now* it's a party—with the quality on hand. Save me a dance—how about it?"

She needed that. She needed any kind of sincere and friendly word that came her way. She blew him a kiss, and he sent one back, with another for interest. And the evening was on! The music was

suddenly *something*. Boyd might not be tops, but he had rhythm and style. Life had begun to look up again. And then—

Stalking into the place and barging through the dancers came Big Joe Harrison, tired, dirty and roaring mad. He took one look around, then made his way toward the orchestra where Lute Belknap's performance was highlighting the evening. Halting just opposite him, his legs apart, his face almost purple and his eyes flashing, he pointed a shaking finger at Lute and shouted in a voice hoarse with fury, "Get back to the job, you creep! What do you think you're doing here?"

As if a baton had been waved, the music stopped, the dancers paused, and a startled girl nearby began to scream, and stifled it with her palm.

Lute's incredulous grin faded, and the banjo slipped to his lap.

Still smarting from her recent baptism by fire, Nancy swung away from Boyd and moved slowly toward the intruder. For Lute's warm gesture earlier had saved her pride. Now she paused, direct and hostile, to appraise Big Joe. "Well, what do

you know! Hamlet—the Eagle, in a windbreaker and dungarees!"

Though he could not hide his astonishment, Big Joe could still smile, it seemed, if an almost frightening grimace could come under that heading. "Well, what have we got here? Katharina the shrew—in a wig and mini skirt!"

The rapid tattoo of a baton restored the music, a bit blurred at first.

Big Joe shouted, "Get crackin', Belknap. You're in trouble!"

Boyd said, "Come on, Nancy. Let's dance."

"No. Let's get out of here—*now!*"

Managing to assume a casual air, she preceded him, her eyes straight ahead.

In the car, Boyd took another look at the moon. "Nice night, and it's still early. What do you say to a run up to McGregor Point?"

"You read my mind. There's always something going on at Charlie's. I think there's a combo from Grand Rapids—The In Betweens."

"Yeah, that's right. Neat rhythm."

"Well, then, step on it."

You could talk to Boyd Clay the way you could

slip on an old shoe. He had no intensities; he was a kind of passionless Ben Gazzara. Just the type for the moment. No fencing necessary, no unease as to possible incident. Just a male who answered her needs with which to get through the remainder of the evening.

The combo was good, offering attractive arrangements of old-time favorites and enough rock to satisfy devotees.

Boyd said, "How come, Nan? You're really stepping tonight. Carol Lawrence in the flesh."

"It's the music." She looked away as she answered him. Her eyes were bright—too bright, a little wild. She was tense as a banjo string tuned to its ultimate strength. "Maybe you're not with it."

"I'm not up to your style. You've got what it takes."

It was the labored note in his laughter that touched her. "You're all right, Boyd." It was a kind, almost pitying tone. It was like a cue to something within her that responded. She would make a night of it and show the world she didn't care, not about it or them or anything. Boyd was as good a subject as any. Folks weren't accustomed to see Nancy Winters in such a mood as this. And,

of course, there were comments. She danced with men she would never have accepted before. A group eventually clustered around, and she was the life of the party.

The bar was kept busy. Boyd eventually proved his ability to manage a situation that was getting out of hand. Not without secret admiration, Nancy went along with his demand, to the regretful protests of the little crowd.

One farewell line haunted her, troubled her—not for just an hour afterward, but for days; a line some chap had probably uttered idly, in a voice with a wink in it. "I had her pegged all wrong. You never know, do you?"

Little was said on the drive home. As he brought the car to her door, Boyd said, "I'll be around, Nan, if you need me." The implication was kind, but it stung. Even to Boyd she was an object of pity. Her proud stance faltered, and she mounted the steps into the quiet house.

Chapter 2

A light was on in the library, the reading lamp above her father's chair. He had probably forgotten it, for the chair was empty, and Nancy knew that much earlier her mother had retired.

She stood for a long moment, hurting as if having been lashed, then snatched off the wig, flung it across the room, and dropped to the davenport to release tears that had crowded for these long, unbearable hours—the tears and the sobs and the agony that were like a fever in her blood.

She did not even hear the car outside, nor the

sound of her father's steps as he came in and stood for a while in the doorway lost in thought. Then, as he moved toward his chair, a deep, audible sob halted his steps, and he went over to the davenport.

Nancy labored to a sitting position and looked up, her face stained and distorted.

"Well, what the devil has happened to your head?" he demanded. "You look like Phyllis Diller."

She abandoned pride and relinquished herself again to the wrenching sobs.

He allowed time for the paroxysm to subside, then went to his chair, slipped off his shoes, and closed his aching, bloodshot eyes. "Come here," he said then, rather gently. And waited.

After a while she stumbled over, pushed his feet aside, and made a place for herself on the big leather hassock.

"Want to tell me about it?"

"No."

"Did you kill someone? Did someone try to kill you? What happened to Boyd Clay in the shuffle?"

"No games, Father, please."

"Give me a rundown—and stop sniffling. Here, take this."

She shook out the big white linen square gratefully. Funny, just the familiar medical-smoky smell was a comfort.

"Now, let's have it."

She told him of the scene at the Club, in detail. After a pause, he said thoughtfully, "I wonder what happened to Big Joe Harrison while he was in Connecticut at that meeting. Something different about him when he showed up tonight."

"You saw him?"

"Yes. He flew in unexpectedly, it seems. He wasn't expected back so soon. Seems he was scheduled for Delaware tomorrow. It turned out to be bad timing. Something went wrong at the Project and a man was badly hurt. Everything possible is being done at the hospital, but I might get a call any minute. Big Joe carried on like a maniac. I never saw him go wild like that before, and there have been other accidents."

"What happened, anyway?"

"Well, Lute Belknap went off to that shindig of yours, after laying out an important step for the night shift. The fellows followed it, and one of

them paid dear for Lute's mistake. It seems he blew the plan—in a hurry, of course, to get to the Club. His instructions didn't check with the blueprint. We haven't heard the last of this little deal yet."

"And Big Joe Harrison went into his act, of course. Always the big shot. He works with POWER—lives in it—he's drunk with it!"

"Big Joe is a perfectionist, and he cares for the safety of his men. But he must have been angry at something that happened before he got here. He was like a madman. Yet somehow I sensed there was more than the Project on his mind—and rage at Lute Belknap's carelessness. Whatever happened in Connecticut—well, I'd say it was serious."

"Maybe he got into trouble with the top brass back there. Maybe his own job is shaky."

"Not likely."

"Has he the right to abuse Lute Belknap?"

"Honey, as far as I can figure, he has the right to do most anything he pleases—anything that concerns the Project. What he says goes. He's done pretty well for a fellow his age, with practi-

cally his whole life ahead of him. An engineering expert with a brain and an uncanny executive ability. Great Western is mighty lucky to have latched on to him. Lute's in the wrong, and badly."

"He didn't look too worried."

"Maybe he's not. He's top material himself. I'll bet if that Marlborough Construction Company up beyond Hotchkiss should hear he was available, they'd be down here tonight to snap him up. Of course, that's an industrial setup, and this is utility. That project isn't as massive as this one, but it's important. He'll land on his feet, don't worry."

"I'll never speak to Lute again if he gives in."

"Nonsense. He isn't off the same piece of cloth as that Bert individual. . . . You know, I never interfere with your dates, but I had that fellow's number right from the start."

"You didn't try to make a mystery of it, either."

"No. I didn't like that guy. His eyes—" He shook his head. "And something about his laugh —a phony if I ever heard one. Not from the heart. Look out for the enthusiast, Nancy, the extremist.

They're about as dependable as quicksand. Give me a man like Big Joe Harrison every time. He's got guts."

"You can have him! I'll never look at him again."

"Want to bet?"

"After what he did tonight, and after what he said to me?"

"Where did I get the idea you started it?" Her father smiled.

"Do you think I was going to stand there and let him sound off like that to Lute and put him down before us all?"

"I don't see what business it was of yours."

"Lute is my friend."

"And, of course, he saved your pride tonight."

"I think we both could stand some coffee." Nancy slid off the hassock. "You'll have a few minutes to try and figure out what makes a monster out of a man."

When she returned with the coffee, Solomon close at her heels, the doctor roused himself. His voice was weary but warm. "You and your shadow." He bent to pat Solomon's head and received a polite lick on the wrist, but there were

dog biscuits as well as muffins on the plate that required Solomon's attention.

"Here, drink this, Father. You're hitting it too hard. You look exhausted. It worries me."

Solomon bore with the small talk as the gentleman he was, nor did he snatch the biscuit from his mistress's fingers.

"You've done a good job training him, do you know that?" Her father took a deep, appreciative draft of coffee. "You have an instinct for dispensing discipline, but not particularly for accepting it."

"Whatever brought this up? I never try to discipline Solly. I love him and he loves me. It's as simple as that."

"Not quite."

"Oh, those obedience tests, with the trainer showing his power, all that sort of thing. They make me tired. I don't like people who love to show their power."

"Love is power," he said thoughtfully.

"In a measure. Too much love is sickening, like too much power."

"Too much of anything defeats itself."

"Well, I hope your friend the Eagle—I under-

stand that's Big Joe Harrison's title—I hope he learns his lesson one of these days. He's got it coming. I'd like to be around to see him humbled. What a moment!" Nancy rose and poked the fire with a vehemence that made her father glance up. "Mr. Power—the Eagle! Isn't that something!"

"Seems to me I detect a note of hate in your voice, Nancy."

"Hate? I wouldn't waste any extra heartbeats on that Harrison monster. The Eagle, indeed! Anything but. Eagles are proud and kingly."

The doctor sat forward uneasily. "I've never seen you quite like this."

"No, I don't think you have." Her tone was steady and hard. "Because I never before knew what it was to hate."

"It seems to me you're aiming at the wrong target."

She ignored the implication. "Big Joe Harrison was trembling with power when he stormed into the Club, and he wielded it like the proverbial headsman. . . . *Power.*"

The doctor made no answer, and the word seemed to hang between them in an unpleasant silence. Solomon looked at Nancy, studied her, then

slowly moved over to the rug before the fire where the lazy flames further engoldened his beautiful coat.

With an air of uncertainty, Nancy took the tray into the kitchen, but this time Solomon did not follow her. When she returned, he did not look up or move. She met her father's eyes, then dropped to the hassock at his feet.

"I'm sorry I let my feelings go." She reached a hand toward Solomon, and he rose slowly and came toward her, in obeyance but not in joy. She hugged him hard, held him.

"He saw another side to his idol tonight," her father observed.

"I'm not myself these days, Father," she admitted, "but I'm trying." She gave him her hand.

He held it briefly. "When you decided to quit college, I had a battle with myself. I was determined to win out, and you were just as determined not to continue. You had that sculpturing bug in your blood, and I faced it. Nature had more power than I. . . . You see, wherever you turn there is power in some form or other. . . . I always felt the whole business was your Aunt Grace's fault. If she hadn't given you that dratted

box with all the sculpturing truck in it for Christmas that year—".

"I loved it! I always secretly had a yen—and she understood."

"Yes, you loved it, and you never got decent marks in school after that."

"I was tops in art class."

"And you still feel it's what's meant for you in life?"

"You liked the dolphin I made. You liked it well enough to display it in your office in town."

"Had to show that you had a little intelligence," he muttered. But his guilty smile betrayed the pride he felt in that talent.

"Now just a minute," she protested. "Don't deny that you've been interested in the prize exhibition coming up at the Baldwin Art Galleries in Detroit. Why, you even went so far as to suggest a subject, since I've been undecided. And Dr. Delavan's nice words about my work at The League impressed you a little—now admit it."

"Not interested, exactly." He shrugged. "Resigned is a better word. I know when I'm licked. Did you say power? Whatever became of mine, I wonder? I began to lose it somewhere along the

way—in the matter of college, when you talked of nothing else but that sculpturing. I lost it for fair when that renegade Lowry appeared on the scene."

"Father, *please*—"

Soon he went on thoughtfully: "When you talked of nothing but sculpturing, I took my defeat and had that studio built for you out in the garden. And—"

"Don't you understand we all have to do our own thing? You're a doctor because you recognized your need. It was a compulsion. You would have found a way, somehow, to practice medicine. I know you. You don't take defeat sitting down."

"You have a point," he admitted presently. "A man has to live his own life. It's wrong for another to abort a destiny. And the more I thought of it, the more convinced I became that your fight for your rights in life was valid. I was selfish. I wanted for you what seemed best to me. And frankly, it began to get to me. When you couldn't decide on a subject for the exhibition, I found myself thinking of possibilities. It even began to trickle into my mind and distract me."

"I'm afraid I've been a trial to you, Father. You're a big man. I've always admired you and wanted to please you, but I had to do what I had to do!"

"I realized that," he sighed. "And then we made a pact, if you remember. I agreed to let you pass up college and concentrate on sculpturing—let you register at The Art Students League in Detroit. I went all the way. And you played along, gave it everything you had, and you were making strides. Then—enter this Bert individual—"

"Can't we leave him out of it?" Nancy begged.

He tapped the arm of his chair thoughtfully and was silent for a while. Then, "You know, one evening while you were out gallivanting with His Nibs, I strolled back to your studio in the garden and—"

"I don't believe it!" She looked up, wide-eyed.

"Why not?"

"Well, the way you growled and muttered all the time you were having it built for me—"

"All right. So I growled and muttered. But I haven't been sorry, to tell the truth, until that Bert character entered the picture. And when I went out there that evening, the place looked as if

you'd run off to a fire or something. The junk you'd been working with was left in a heap with your smock on the floor. It told a story I didn't like. And when I looked around at the handsome objects you had created, I felt like wringing that guy's neck."

"Could we have Chapter Two some other time?"

"No. We'll have it now and close the subject for good. I kept thinking about your plan to enter the exhibit at the Baldwin Galleries, and the letter you got from that big shot Dr. Delavan, acknowledging the questionnaire and your plans. That was significant. He's for you, Nancy, whether you know it or not. He likes your stuff—he admires your talent."

Silence then, except for the sound among the embers.

"I was proud," he went on. "I was with you a hundred per cent when you got that recognition. I saw the way it stirred you up and got you thinking of a possible subject—choosing, discarding, considering. It was a little show in itself. You sold me on the whole business. And now the life has gone out of you. And it's too late. You haven't got

a chance to land that prize. You're drained, you're torpid, you— See here, none of that crying business!"

"Who's crying?"

"Oh, forget the dramatics. There's one question I want to ask you, and I want a straight answer. Are you through with this sculpturing business?"

"What do *you* think?" she flared.

"I think this: either get back into that studio and get to work, or come into my office in town and help Miss Nissen. She's coming down with something at the moment; it may be nothing serious, and again it may. These are tight days for me with the Project and all."

"I'd be a great help to you down there now, wouldn't I?"

"You could at least answer the phone and take down messages and appointments until I can line up someone else if Miss Nissen needs much time off. Might do you good to see how the other half lives—girls who have to work for a living—instead of going around sniffling over a no-good trifler. I thought you had guts."

"Thanks for nothing—" but now her voice broke.

He reached over and drew her close. "That wasn't fair, I'll admit. But strong medicine was indicated. . . . Nancy, the first grand passion comes to everyone. They're not prepared for the inevitable shock and disillusionment. I'd hoped you'd be spared this." He dropped his head back and closed his eyes.

She respected his silence, for there was an expression on his face she was familiar with—one of reminiscence, of memory, of another day, another time.

Presently he said, "And then the real thing happens. And—that's life."

"Did it happen to you, Father?" she asked quietly.

There was no answer. He pressed the tear-stained hand to his cheek. "So it was pretty bad tonight, eh?"

"It was horrible."

Solomon whined a bit and nuzzled her hand.

"Somebody should have told you that nobody talks back to Big Joe Harrison."

"I didn't talk back. I gave it to him straight off." Her cheeks were flushed with anger.

"And asked for a nice little blow in return."

"It was worth it."

There was secret pride in his smile now. "My sight must be waning. I would have sworn I saw a white feather in my crow the other night."

"Better have your glasses changed." The air of defeat had vanished. "Well, I've got to be up early. There's work waiting for me in the studio."

"Wait just a minute. You're on call to pinch-hit for Miss Nissen if necessary. I'm troubled about her."

"Well, just in passing, I'd like to make it very clear that I'm no longer troubled about men in general. Make no mistake, as the fellow says." She was laughing again, and blew him a kiss and ran up the stairs with Solomon loping along after her.

Her final words had set the doctor off on a train of thought that had disturbed him earlier: Big Joe's repressed anger when he returned to the Project and the tense scene in the field house. What had happened to him back East? It was a mood he had never shown before, a kind of deadly

anger. What a moment to face at the Club—with Nancy's pert comment to intensify his feelings! What could have happened to Big Joe Harrison back East?

Chapter 3

Joe Harrison set down the company's business plane in a small airfield not far from Hartford at two in the morning. Freight planes entirely. No big time, only air trucking, confusion, noise, bawdy and profane shouting. Tired men in the pouring rain—wet, hungry, doing their thing in the world of men who came up the hard way. School dropouts, or ghetto habitues out to make a buck in a world where education meant a decent job and livelihood. Sweat and dirt, the grim and

ugly side of life illustrated with the harsh brush of reality.

Joe made for the small shabby terminal and managed the business end of the deal with the authorities. He was tired. This was the ugly side of the job. Tomorrow, at a luncheon at the Athletic Club, he would speak before the meeting that was scheduled, something he had reluctantly agreed to do. His wide range of experience and his keen intelligence made him invaluable to Great Western, but times like tonight, for instance, he wasn't too sold on the job.

However, he would have an hour or two in Hartford to contact a certain girl who was more or less on his mind. That was the one bright spot. That would make up for the rest of it. Then, the next day, a brief stop at another unit and back to Channel City.

He would get a couple of hours' sleep here, then call a Hertz office and drive into the city, shower, dress and go over his notes. Right now he had had it. The day had been one of those rough ones. Besides, his sinuses were acting up, and the weather wasn't helping.

He registered for a room at what they called a

motel, which, the fellow said, was down the road just beyond the garage; then he took a stool at the lunch counter and bore with some of the worst coffee in his experience.

The mechanic on the stool beside him was muttering about his relief who hadn't shown up, and there was a carburetor that had to be checked, and what did they make this coffee out of? Ragweed? And why did people have to bring in a Thunderbird with a faulty carburetor at this hour of the night, anyway? That was a tricky job at best. . . .

As Joe sloshed along the puddled path, the sickly overhead light filtered through the mist. There was another light in the grubby garage, and he could make out a parked jeep, a dilapidated old Chevy, and a Thunderbird. He stopped abruptly. The latter was familiar. Too familiar. So was the license plate. He had driven that car himself. . . .

He stood there, rain sweeping against his face, soaking his shoes and ankles. For a long moment he did not move. Then he went on toward the motel. Of the six units, only one was lighted within. He knocked at the door.

He had never before seen the man who opened

it, but he could see beyond where a tipsy reading lamp was bent over a girl sitting in a shabby, overstuffed chair, knees under her, fanning the pages of a magazine. He had seen her before, often, so often that he had begun to think about seeing a lot more of her in the future. And love had been mentioned mutually.

Joe was a big man, a quarterback in the not too distant past. He had the strength, it was said, of a bull. And now he brought it into action.

The girl stood in the doorway during the battle, her fists against her lips. She did not scream. The fracas lasted briefly, and her companion lay inert on the walk in front of the unit. Then at last she choked, "Joe, for God's sake, what have you done?"

He ignored her, returned to the little terminal, threw the key on the counter, and called Hertz. He kept his word to the company, delivered the speech at the Hartford Club, and left at once. He took the plane up again, stopped off for the brief interview at Conneaut, and reached Channel City by midevening to find one of his men perhaps fatally hurt through another's carelessness.

Chapter 4

Miss Nissen had always seemed a depersonalized figure who operated with the efficiency of a machine. But this morning Miss Nissen took on the aura of genius as Nancy made the demanded effort to substitute in her place. Still smarting from her father's allusion to her lack of intelligence and stamina, she gave the job everything she had.

The telephone was possessed of the devil. There beyond sat Mrs. Follansbee, a regular weekly patient, and Mrs. Chancellor Burnham,

Channel City's wealthiest old widow, spoiled, self-indulgent, and impatient.

"What on earth is keeping your father, Nancy?" she demanded querulously now. "I have a hair appointment in less than an hour."

"Mornings are always uncertain, because Father has to check at the hospital. He never knows what he's going to run into there."

"Well, I'm afraid it's a matter of bad management!" The head tossed, the lips tightened, and there was a resentful gleam in the eye.

Miss Nissen would have responded with a palliative remark. Miss Winters said bluntly, "Sickness doesn't always send out storm signals."

"Well, the idea!" Mrs. Burnham bristled, but Miss Winters ignored her. Chancellor Burnham, industrialist, deceased, had owned considerable property in Channel City, had been the main stockholder in the leading industries, and had other substantial financial interests far beyond local boundaries. People wondered how he would have handled the invasion of the Power Project, if he would have fought the legalized takeover, at their own price, of innumerable acres the Project desired and were able to buy, since ninety per

cent of the surrounding countryside had yielded to their demands and gone along with prices not exactly commensurate with the real value—in particular the home-value of old settlers and their families.

Mrs. Chancellor Burnham had fought the big time and lost, since her properties were in the ten per cent that had not yielded. She had fought and lost, for the Project was of utility rather than industry. And she was bitter. She had become obsessed with the situation because she had been compelled to sell the fine old Burnham mansion on the lake shore and take up residence in a new home that she despised. Since Mrs. Burnham enjoyed nothing so much as a juicy bit of gossip, she now had a solid conversation piece with tremendous possibilities.

But her wealth and social status meant little to Nancy, who ignored her now while trying to make sense out of the appointment book. Then her father appeared. He nodded to the two waiting patients and beckoned her into his office.

"There's been another accident at the Project. They're bringing the fellow in. It may mean the hospital, but I've got to check. In the meantime, I

can handle Mrs. Follansbee in just a couple of minutes. You can take over placating Mrs. Burnham. Do the best you can."

"Father, try to get someone else, will you? I'll ruin your practice if I don't get out of here. I'm going crazy."

He ignored that. "I'm worried about Mrs. Andrews. She's in kind of a bad way, with a stranger taking care of her at home and her husband in the hospital with a stroke. And they can't reach Audrey. She's on a cruise, God knows where—" He broke off quickly at the look in her eyes. *Bert and Audrey on a cruise.*

It was the wrong time to hear that bit of news. "I can't take it," Nancy groaned. "Honestly, it's too much. I—"

"Get back to that desk," he ordered in the voice he kept for special occasions. Then he opened the door and beckoned Mrs. Follansbee.

With no alternative, Nancy resumed her place, looked up, and met Mrs. Burnham's glare, which she returned in like manner.

"I'll have to make another appointment for you, Mrs. Burnham—there's an emergency."

"I notice the other patient was considered—"

The telephone rang providentially at that moment, and at the same time there was a scuffling at the door. A limping, bandaged man was being propelled gently along by a familiar figure, the sight of whom made Nancy clench her hand on the phone.

"Doc said he'd take us right away, Miss Nissen," Big Joe Harrison announced, then paused in surprise as their eyes met. He frowned and moved on toward the office door as Nancy rose quickly to open it.

With his charge he went in, passing Mrs. Follansbee, who hurried out. After only a moment, Big Joe reappeared. He moved about restlessly, dropped into a chair, snatched up the morning paper and flung it down, rose and paced back and forth. He paused before the mantel, his hands gripped together behind his back, studying the only object there—a sculptured dolphin. Over his shoulder he asked presently, "Where did he get this?"

"It—it was a gift." Nancy's tone did not encourage further conversation.

"Not bad. Who did it?"

"Oh—some unknown." She shrugged.

"Well, he won't be unknown long," Big Joe prophesied. "He's good."

She was able to laugh, her head low over the appointment book.

"What's so funny?" he growled.

"Why, Nancy!" Mrs. Chancellor Burnham spoke up. "You know you made that statue. Your father was so proud the day he put it up there. Took everything else off, even the clock. Just left that, and he stood looking at it and smiling—proud, very proud."

Some inner compulsion made Nancy glance at Joe, hating it, hating him, hating herself. And then their eyes met and held in a kind of strange communication built to a pitch by personal resentments. Yet way down deep she was aware of a force within her that confused and demanded. Like a film, with speed induced for effect, before her passed the picture of his gentleness with the bandaged man, a flash of kindness in this person she despised, a streak of humanity in this outlaw.

But now Joe ignored her and abruptly moved to the entrance door where he stood looking out, hands high above his head on either side of the door jamb.

Many times Nancy had seen her father assume that pose when his mind was troubled and he was thinking about some case, some problem. And now she saw Big Joe, inner turmoil stiffening his body, a magnificent physical specimen, like an eagle with spread wings. And the impression instantly crystallized. That great body, those widespread arms, that giant head—the Eagle—*the Eagle!* She had found the answer to her long quest for a subject for the exhibition. She could see the finished piece. At last she had found it! Yet the answer was born in hate. It gave her a strange feeling. Could anything spawned by hate be worthwhile? she wondered.

Now he resumed his stance before the mantel, but the scene had left an indelible picture in her mind. Ideas for the sculptured eagle that she would achieve—vast wings outspread, powerful, soaring. And above, the menacing head, the cruel beak, the threatening talons. Creativity flamed. The time had come! As soon as this interlude was over, she would begin.

Then the door burst open, and an attractive blonde dashed in, breathless. It was obvious she

had been taught the better points of body control. Beautiful, yet more. Through Nancy's mind flashed the memory of a painting, *Miss Innocence*. By Gilbert Stuart, perhaps. She had seen it first in school. She had never forgotten it. And now she seemed to see it again, here in this room. The girl had wide, rather childish eyes, an almost timid smile on the lovely mouth, and an air of grace and delicacy. The quietly expensive elegance of azure summer tweeds was complemented by a long silk scarf of harmonious shades.

She looked around the room. Then, "Oh, Joe—darling! I was so afraid I'd miss you!"

He almost stumbled toward her, his eyes flashing. "What are you doing here?"

"I called the field house at the Project, and they said I might reach you here—if you hadn't already left. But only if it was an emergency."

"And you told them it was, of course!" It might have been a computer's stony voice.

"It was—*me*," she said softly.

"Well, you've succeeded in making a complete fool of yourself before some respectable people—"

"Joe," she was begging as she ran forward and

grasped his lapels, "we've got to have a talk—soon —now—anywhere. I've got to explain—"

Now the ambulance siren sounded as it came up the drive.

"Nancy," the doctor called, "get Joe in here." And there followed the business of stretcher and orderlies and the attendant confusion to such a scene. Then they were on their way to the hospital with Joe along, and Dr. Winters, obviously troubled, pausing to say to Nancy, "Why don't you tell Mrs. Burnham I can't see her today? Make another appointment. And call my service. Let them take over. I realize you can't handle it. I'll get Miss Reed from the hospital." And he was gone.

"Well, I like that!" declared Mrs. Chancellor Burnham. "Has this Power Project hypnotized everyone in Channel City? Has none of us any rights any more? Is a workman more important than a patient of years?"

When Nancy made no answer but began to straighten up the desk, Mrs. Burnham turned to the figure in blue tweed, the silent, brooding figure about whom, somehow, there was an air not entirely of innocence.

"And the way that creature spoke to you!" Mrs. Burnham's tone took on a hint of hysteria now. "They are all savages, ruffians. They are like the Cossacks in Russia who would drive their horses into people's homes and destroy and kill as they go. The Power Project! Power indeed! I'll see to this, legally. I will not permit them to destroy Channel City entirely. Somebody has got to speak up."

The girl made no answer. She looked across at Nancy, but it was evident the gaze was without focus, but not without fury. It is doubtful whether even Gilbert Stuart would have been tempted to catch such an expression.

"What is your name, dear?" Mrs. Burnham was asking her.

"Julie Fuller."

"You're a stranger here, of course, and I can imagine your state of mind after such an encounter. My dear, I'm going to take you home with me where you can rest and pull yourself together. We have both been grievously insulted." She flashed a resentful glance toward the desk.

"But—" Julie Fuller demurred.

"No, I will not listen. You're in no condition to

leave here by yourself—you're actually trembling. I'll have Charles bring the car around; we can talk it all out later."

Soon they were gone, yet Nancy could not brush from her mind the expression on Julie Fuller's lovely face. It was anything but innocent. Was there some valid reason for Big Joe's attitude? It seemed impossible. And yet, his anger was deep and passionate. Could it have been born in truth? Was truth its source? As Nancy went about straightening the office, the thought nagged. It was impossible, or was it?

As the Burnham car drove away, she began to sift the incredible events of the morning and face them one by one. And she came to the mention of Audrey's mother. Her father had said, "Mrs. Andrews is in a bad way, and her husband's in the hospital with a stroke. And they can't reach Audrey. She's on a cruise somewhere." Audrey—Audrey and Bert—on a cruise. . . .

Nancy had thought she would never see that house again, or the beloved mother of one she had called a friend. And yet some impulse of which hate had no part dominated and swept aside resolve as she locked the office door and stepped into

her car. The road she took went past the Andrews' house. A back road, not the old familiar one above the lake.

The hour with Audrey's mother could have been healing, if everywhere she looked she was not reminded of other days, remembered happiness. . . . On leaving, she was glad she had obeyed the impulse, for the warmth of that smile and the gratitude could not be shrugged off. But the old hate, like a monster lying low, waited to claim her again. And soon she was reviewing the indignities she had suffered, the pain, and she longed for an outlet, for it was all like some great imprisoned torrent that somehow had to be released. She couldn't wait to get home, to get back to her studio and go about creating the piece of sculpture that would ease this torment.

Solomon greeted her as she came up the drive, and raced joyously along. She dropped to her knees and held him, hearing her mother call from the doorway, "Nancy, for heaven's sake—your dress, your stockings—you'll be a sight."

She could not face the inevitable questioning about her activities at the office and ran around through the garden to her studio, Solomon beside

her. There she yielded to the despised tears that were bound to have their way. With him beside her on the bench, she surveyed her haven of refuge.

Ah, the comfort of the familiar! Antiques everywhere, the dangling skeleton grinning in the far corner, the bust of Homer on the shelf, along with numerous other heads of the immortals, half-finished pieces of her own on pedestals here and there. The eternal vat of clay, long neglected, the hose beside it.

Looking up, she traced the delicate fringe of cobwebs hanging from the drop beams. Someday she would mount a stool and with a broom perhaps could reach them, but not today. . . . This cluttered room was more home to her than the big house beyond. Once she had been free in her heart. She had been in love, and all was right with the world. She had her love, she had her friend, the glamorous future beckoned, and then suddenly she had nothing. And it was more than she could bear.

Then hate came slithering in like some sly monster and took over her thinking. She reviewed the grievances, now magnified, and in that mood

set about fashioning the armature that would eventually become the sculptured eagle that she would call Dark Power. At last she had a worthy subject for her talents.

Strange that hate contained a facet that yielded satisfaction. Was it satisfaction or, rather, an insidious exultance—revenge, a thing that made you breathless and triumphant? Not beauty, no, not beauty. . . .

She worked intensely, unaware of time, then suddenly missed Solomon. She called to him, but he had wandered outside. Somewhere in the garden, probably. She had ignored him through this entire period, had shrugged off the proffered paw and sharply demanded to be left alone. Always before she had taken time to favor him, but this thing that possessed her wanted no interference. It was like a flame blazing brightly, a flame that had to be fed.

She had declined lunch and pursued her work at fever pitch. It was not until her father, home for dinner, appeared in the doorway that she relaxed, sat back, and surveyed what she had done before she answered his, "Well, what now?"

"Do you think it has possibilities?"

"I'm thinking more about you, Nancy. Your color is high. Your eyes—there's something about them. What is all this, anyway?"

"I'm calling it Dark Power," she said slowly, studying her handiwork.

"An eagle. You mean Harrison, don't you? You claim he is drunk with power, but you are exercising that very thing right now—the power of hate."

She only smiled. It wasn't a pleasant smile.

"See here, Nancy. Don't let this situation get control of you. Life is a series of situations. We meet them, and go on and profit by what we've learned."

"We do what our nature demands."

"Not quite, in civilized circles. A little self-discipline is in order. No one ever gets everything his own way. There's only a percentage."

She was militantly silent.

"Better come in now. Your mother says you've been out here most of the day."

Nancy shrugged and unbuttoned her smock.

"By the way, where's Solomon? I thought he'd be out here. He isn't in the house."

Nancy frowned. "He isn't? Come to think of it, I haven't seen him for hours. I've been so—"

"That's not like him. Maybe he found the atmosphere too thick. He's a very sensitive gentleman."

"Nothing could have happened—" she faltered. "I was right here all the time."

"You're not yourself, Nancy. You're putting up a fight, but I disapprove of the motivation. Hate is a destructive element. Besides, it's bad for the blood pressure."

But she wasn't listening. "I wonder where he's gone. He never did that before, but—I really wasn't very nice to him."

"He found a stranger here, just as I did," her father said quietly. "He has a way of standing aloof from strangers."

"Don't talk like that!" But there was a note of fear in her voice. "Solly—why, Solly is—he's part of me. He understands me." She hurried out and called him, and called again, and eventually went into the house when he failed to appear.

Her father made no comment. Her mother—brisk, efficient, and quite down to earth—made

light of the situation. "You two treat him like a human being. After all, he's only a dog."

Nancy said, "He's the best friend I've got."

"Thanks." And Dr. Winters smiled.

"Oh, you know what I mean."

But she left and ran down through the garden, whistling for Solomon, calling him again and again, whistling and calling.

Evening. Then night came on, with Solomon still missing. At a very late hour Nancy was ordered to bed. But there was no sleep. Solly was gone. Where?

Chapter 5

The telephone rang shortly after seven the next morning. Dr. Winters reached for it groggily. "What's that—Spear?—Doc Spear?" He sat up sharply as the veterinarian made himself understood.

"Sorry to get you out so early, but I know you must be worried—you and Nancy."

"What is it? What's up? Solomon?"

"Right. About three this morning, that big shot Harrison at the Project brought him in. There's been some trouble on the job, and he was driving

along the spur they've made up toward the reservoir. When he came out on the main road, his lights caught an animal lying at the edge. He brought him right here, and it's just as well. The dog would have conked out in another hour or two. Looks as if someone was trying to pick him up—he's a handsome thing. He put up quite a battle. He'd been hit—leg broken, bleeding badly. I rather think he'll make it. I called early because I know what that dog means to Nancy. When she brings him here, it's as if she's bringing a child."

"Thanks, old man." Dr. Winters drew an unsteady hand across his eyes. "We'll be right over to get him—or should he stay there for a while?"

"Quite a while, I'd say."

In hardly more than ten minutes the doctor's car was racing along the road toward the Spear Animal Hospital. There were no words—except Nancy's "Oh, no, please—not Solly."

"About that piece of hate sculpture," the doctor said abruptly, for she seemed ready to collapse, "that one of the eagle. Do you suppose you could suggest a dimensional character while you're at it?"

"Anyone would pick up an injured animal!"

"I love you very much, my dear, but sometimes I don't quite like you."

She ignored that. "Will we have to leave him there?"

"Yes. That's Spear's verdict." He turned in now at the animal hospital drive.

The reunion of dog and mistress verified a mutual devotion that the two doctors observed in moved silence.

Dr. Winters said quietly, "What are the damages, Spear?"

"The bill is paid. This fellow Harrison took care of that. I told him whose dog it was, but that didn't matter. He insisted. Said he'd drop by or call up sometime today to see how Solomon was."

"He can't do that!" declared Nancy. "Return his money. This is my dog, and I pay my own bills."

"Sorry, Nancy. You'll have to take that up with him."

Nancy glanced at her father for support and found no answering sympathy. He was preparing to leave.

"I'll be back after a while," she told the doctor.

"Solly will be lonesome. He's never been away from home before."

"He's a handsome boy. Personally, I think someone tried to carry him off, and he fought back and got the worst of the bargain."

She winced at the thought. "He's probably frightened, but he knows you. He's always liked you, and you've taken such good care of him."

In the car again, she fumed, "Anyone but that power-drunk Big Joe Harrison! Anyone but him. Of all the revolting developments—that does it! You'll have to call him, of course, and thank him —and pay him."

"Not me. He's your dog."

"Do you mean you—you expect me to contact him?"

"Suit yourself. It's your affair."

"I never heard of such a thing!"

"Well, now you have. . . . By the way, I thought Spear did an excellent job with that splint on Solomon's leg. He's quite an operator in that field."

But Nancy was not listening. Her father meant business. When he spoke in that tone, it was final.

The studio was deserted that day. The place was like a tomb without Solly. Restlessly Nancy passed the hours until midafternoon, then sped off to the animal hospital. Besides, she was facing an ordeal in trying to compose a letter to Big Joe Harrison, and failing again and again.

She found Solly slowly improving, overjoyed at seeing her but still unable to be moved.

"I wonder what he was doing on that road way up there." She frowned. "I've never known him to wander off like that."

"As I said before"—Dr. Spear gently touched the golden coat—"it's my feeling that someone picked him up and he proved too much for one person. Lots of strangers around here these days. It isn't the same old town any more. Take those old-timers who were uprooted so that the Upper Reservoir of the Project could be handled. They're not having it too easy. I understand Andrews had a stroke from the shock. That's kind of a sad case," he mused. "And the Purdys—you know them. They say Mrs. Purdy cries a lot. She misses her old home. And—"

At that point a car came up the drive, and when

the door opened, Big Joe Harrison strode in. "Hello, Doc. Thought I'd drop by and see how my friend is getting along." Then his eyes met Nancy's. "Hello! I'm sorry about your dog, but the doc says he'll be all right before long. I didn't think he'd make it, but there's good stuff in him."

Appreciation of his kindness to Solly, ingrained hatred and resentment, and a curious feeling she did not understand became an admixture that made speech temporarily impossible. She managed to falter, "Thank you—for what you did for my dog."

"Why not?" He shrugged. But his eyes were magnetic, a strange something in them that held her.

"I owe you for the bill. If you'll tell me what it is—"

"You don't owe me anything. I'd have done the same thing for a mongrel."

She insisted. "About the bill—"

"Forget it. By the way, Doc, how is—what's his name—Solomon?"

"He's coming along. You've made a friend for life."

"We can always use one."

"I resent having you put me in this position." Nancy's tone was sharp. "I always pay my bills. I don't care to be under obligation to anyone."

"Why don't you be specific? You mean to *me*."

"I'm not the sort to deliberately blast out at a person."

"You weren't so fussy the other night." He had tried to be agreeable. All right, his tone said, if you wanna fight—let's go!

"You asked for it," she blazed.

"As I recall, you struck the first blow."

"And, like a gentleman, you responded—nobly."

"You wanted to play rough, that was okay with me. What did you expect?"

"I wasn't surprised, after your tirade against Lute!"

Joe glanced at his watch. "Sorry. I haven't time to waste on small talk. See you, Doc—and look after my friend, now." He stormed out.

Solomon, in his cage just beyond, whined a bit at his going.

"I'll be back this evening," Nancy managed to say to the doctor when Joe's car had roared out of the drive. She was trembling, she was furious, she

was confused—but she felt something she had never felt before. It was like a kind of heady drink that had an immediate and disturbing effect.

The speedometer rose by the second.

Chapter 6

Mrs. Chancellor Burnham listened thoughtfully as she stirred her tea.

"And that was how it began," Julie Fuller was saying, and under that watchful eye she reached for the little cruet of rum to add a bit more to her cup.

"I don't see how you ever stood him." Mrs. Burnham frowned. "So crude—a beast, really. Football hero, indeed!" She sniffed and shook her head.

"Oh, there's glamour in a cheering crowd—the

quarterback hero, you know. You're stimulated by the excitement. The hero of the day chooses you for his attentions, and the other girls are jealous of you. And before you know it, you're hooked. Sounds silly, doesn't it?"

"I'm no judge of the things going on today with young people." The tone was not without sympathetic understanding.

"Well, it is, but it's life as I found it. And dignity goes out the window. And if he's the Joe Harrison type, he makes a fool of you. That's the way with that crowd back home, anyway. By the time you come to your senses and the spell is broken, you want to die. I did, pretty near. But I came to my senses today in the doctor's office. And then—you saved the day. Why did you bother with me? From what you saw, it must have been pretty thick."

"Oh, don't worry. You're not the only one who's suffered from the philandering of those Project men. Take Nancy Winters, for instance—the doctor's daughter. If you knew *that* story—" There was naked anticipation in what she was about to divulge.

"Tell me." Julie sat forward eagerly.

"In a way, I do feel sorry for her—the humiliation and all," Mrs. Burnham added after offering a fantastic version larded with incredible details. But Mrs. Burnham loved nothing so much as gossip.

"Really?" Julie Fuller slowly revived at this incredible news. "I thought she had sort of an acid tongue."

"She was just taking the place of the regular nurse. Dr. Winters would lose every patient he had if she were left in charge. Did you notice how she spoke to me? I was astounded! These days, I understand, she's very proud of herself because she's going to show in the big spring exhibition at the Baldwin Galleries in Detroit. Her mother has mentioned here and there that the Director finds Nancy's work *very* excellent." She smirked. "Well, if she ever becomes a great sculptress, I'd just like to know!"

"Sculptress, did you say?"

"Oh, you've met doting parents before. She's a very sharp and unpleasant woman—no tact, no courtesy. I sometimes wonder when she speaks

even mildly of her daughter's hobby. Shall I say, she has no social flair—just blunt and direct. She's not too attractive, either."

Julie smiled. The picture was not hard to see. No doubt Mrs. Winters had stepped on certain toes.

"By the way, my dear, where are your parents?" Mrs. Burnham sat forward.

Julie sighed. "I really don't know right now. Somewhere abroad. . . ."

"You mean they don't keep in touch?"

"Oh, now and then." Julie smiled vaguely, visualizing the real activities of her parents at the moment.

"You poor dear!" Mrs. Burnham considered the situation briefly. Then, "You've checked in at the hotel?"

"Yes."

Mrs. Burnham rose. "I'll have Charles pick up your things—and I'll telephone the desk. I know the Briggs very well. As a matter of fact, I have stock in the establishment. You'll come here for your stay in Channel City. . . . Tell me, were you engaged to this Harrison person?"

"You might say that." Julie never batted an eye.

"What happened?"

"You wouldn't believe it," she managed to quaver.

"Never mind. We'll discuss it another time. And now, if you'll excuse me, I have some correspondence and other matters to take up with my secretary. You might appreciate a little rest. Your room will be the second door to the right at the head of the stairs."

Julie blew her a kiss through spread fingers that managed to hide a smug smile.

Mrs. Burnham then rang for her secretary, and rang, and rang.

Alta Newcombe appeared presently. "You rang, Mrs. Burnham?"

"Where have you been?" came the testy demand. "You're breathless."

"I was in the garden. It's such a lovely day."

"I'm glad someone around here can enjoy such luxuries. My life is so complicated." She shrugged. "Well, no matter. I want you to take some letters."

Alta Newcombe was the last of a fine old family. Her great-great-grandfather had made a fortune in Michigan ores, to be squandered and lost by his descendants. Alta had breeding, intelligence, and a realization of her dependence on the whims and bounty of Mrs. Chancellor Burnham. She made an excellent secretary. She could handle difficult situations beyond her employer's power, for the question of background entered here. Living in a hotbed of gossip, she disdained it. She avoided trouble, not only for herself but frequently for her employer. She lived a life far from her inclinations and taste.

And now it seemed that Mrs. Burnham had a plan. She had suffered humiliation and defeat through the Power Project. After all, her husband had organized the Burnham Structural Steel Company, which employed a substantial number of Channel City residents. She was the power they all had to reckon with there. Also, she had substantial and controlling stock in three of the leading factories in town. Why should she sit by and allow these high-handed individuals who ran the Power Project to brush her aside as if she didn't matter? And even Dr. Winters, of all people! Her

word carried a lot of weight. It was time she used it.

Past President of the Channel City Women's Club, she had a voice in handling that, too. They always deferred to her. The incoming presidents spent time with her before taking office. It was a sort of ritual. She was on the Board of the Country Club as well. The name Burnham stood for something, and she would exercise the power that was hers.

Never had she felt so outraged as this morning in the doctor's office. To be dismissed as if she were just another patient in the way—and for an employee of the Power Project! It was insufferable.

The first matter of business with Alta was a letter to Dr. Winters, informing him that from now on she would consult a physician who had respect for his patients, one who did not discriminate to suit his own purposes.

And the second matter of business was her plan regarding the local Women's Club. She stated it briefly and to the point.

Alta regarded her with an expression that was too revealing, and Mrs. Burnham's eyes flashed. Alta recognized the danger signals and tardily

drew the usual curtain over what was, this time, an expression of horror.

"Well?" snapped Mrs. Burnham.

But the plan was so incredible, Alta was not able to dissemble. "You mean you really intend to blackball these new people in town who have been put up for membership in the Club?"

"Exactly!"

"But"—conscience prodded Alta to ignore discretion—"do you realize their husbands are some of the top men at the Project? They're really very nice people, Mrs. Burnham. I've met them and—"

"I'm not asking your opinion, Alta. I'm telling you what I want done. Today, contact the members of the Board. You know that on Club day they meet an hour before the women assemble. Be firm. I mean business. I don't care how you manage it, but I want results. That smooth talk of yours has often created miracles. This time you mustn't fail. *I'm determined.*"

Shocked, Alta had no reply available. She could demur, but much was at stake since she was totally dependent on this position in the Burnham household. . . .

The unhappy peregrinations of Alta for the next couple of days are better left to the imagination. On making her calls, she approached the subject carefully, began obliquely, went on to persuasion so mild that offense was discouraged. And, after all, Mrs. Chancellor Burnham was a name to be reckoned with.

The women were shocked, worried, and reluctant, but finally prevailed upon to cooperate.

Last of all, Alta stopped at the Winters' home. The maid explained that her mistress was suffering with a migraine headache, but added that Nancy was in her studio in the garden. And it was there that Alta found her.

In a smock, her sleeves rolled up, her hair in disarray from being flung back from her eyes, Nancy looked up as the door opened after a quick, brief knock. "Well, this is a surprise! How are you, Miss Newcombe?"

Most everybody knew Miss Newcombe and liked her. She played down her attractiveness, using the wisdom of a good-looking girl with a very homely employer.

"Aren't you amazing, Miss Winters! Look at

the excellent pieces you've done—they're wonderful! And what is this you're working on?"

"Oh—I just had an idea the other day—" Nancy turned away from her work on the Eagle, gestured toward a bench, and brushed it off. "This place is a mess—sorry. What can I do for you?"

The routine was simple for Alta. She knew the best psychological approach, the tempo, the words. She had rehearsed them. But in them there was no heart; rather, hope, uncertainty, and a faintly veiled embarrassment. She had a gentle voice with a little music in it somewhere. Nancy liked her.

But now, hearing her message, Nancy stiffened, wiped her hands slowly on a towel, and regarded her caller not without disfavor.

"To sum it all up, Miss Newcombe, I am to understand that with the others on the Board, Mother is to blackball the names presented for membership in the Club—the names of the wives of two top engineers at the Project."

"Let's not put it quite that way," Miss Newcombe managed, not too convincingly. "You see—"

"Indeed I do see! What have those women done —except to be pawns in a scheme for Mrs. Burnham's purpose? Is Mother the first you have approached?"

"Well, not exactly—"

"No, I'll bet not! Mother has no reason to blackball some very nice people—for Mrs. Burnham's purposes. Nor does she have a husband who could be fired from Structural Steel or some other of those factories if she doesn't go along with the ugly plan."

"*Please,* Miss Winters—"

Nancy rose. "You probably have enough without her. And when she hears about this, I doubt if you'll see her there again."

"But she is one of the officers!"

"If you'll excuse me now, Miss Newcombe. I'm quite busy."

Alta Newcombe left quietly.

Nancy dropped to the bench, knees collapsing under her. She realized that her reaction was more than disgust. What was it, in heaven's name, what was it? A protectiveness toward someone she despised, someone who represented the Project in her thoughts? What was the matter with her? Just

because a big show-off had rescued Solomon in the middle of the night and taken him to the vet's—just because—well—

She flung off the smock and went down to the shore to her favorite spot, the mass of rocks at the foot of their property. And she sat there and listened to the gentle wash of the waves and tried to make sense of herself, and failed.

Swinging downstream now came a big freighter with a load of crushed stone for the Project. It was a frequent occurrence. The Project—it was almost like a living thing, a new element in her life and environment. That was responsible for this restlessness—that was it. Everything was changed. The Project was changing the town, changing the horizon, changing *her*.

She caught the flying coattails of hate and went back to the studio. She would put some of this banked-up energy into this piece of sculpture that she would call Dark Power. The evil replica of an eagle, *the* Eagle.

Strange, how the very mention of that name aloud set her heart to beating fast, faster. I've got to get over this hating. I've got to! And yet—

Again she attacked the subject, expending her energies with almost wild abandon, and the very force of her actions achieved an effect that careful procedure could not have managed. For the subject called for broad strokes and spontaneous gestures. It was not a piece that required delicate detail. It had to reflect boldness, more suggestion than reality.

She found that she could lose herself in its creation, and she worked steadily through that day and the few days following. And from her efforts emerged a magnificent eagle in flight. She clung to the mood, fought with herself against this nagging guilt as if she were creating a lie in those menacing eyes, those ominous talons, the attitude of a predator about to descend on its prey, about to plunder, pillage, kill. . . .

On Thursday, her mother refused to have any part of the situation at the Club, but Nancy attended. The meeting took place in the Channel City Hotel. The long table was spread for tea. There were spring flowers—every evidence of a delightful afternoon in wait—and membership

turned out in force, whereas sometimes its ranks were decimated by indifference to program, weather, and what not. For gossip was in the air.

The Board, already seated at its usual table after the preliminary business meeting, was incomplete, due to Mrs. Chancellor Burnham's absence. But Alta Newcombe was in evidence.

The business of the day was to include the announcement of new members accepted by the Board. Today, however, no mention was made of that detail. And as the president went along with other matters and it became evident that the subject of new members would not be mentioned, Nancy rose.

"Madame President, as I recall, names have been presented to the Board for membership, and I have been waiting to hear the announcement that they have been accepted. Isn't it the usual routine?"

Madame President faltered, about to speak, obviously unprepared for this crisis.

"The Board was in conference earlier than usual, I noticed," Nancy went on evenly. "So I assumed that was one of the subjects they discussed."

"It was," admitted the president miserably. And to the amazement of all, she handed the gavel to the vice-president and left, murmuring regrets.

Nancy straightened her shoulders, determined to see it through. "Then are we to understand that the Board did not find the nominees acceptable for membership in the Wonen's Club?"

The vice-president, being less sensitive, stood her ground. "You might say that."

"I might—but how about you? The voice of authority counts. I am only one of many."

"The procedure at this point is difficult. We are seldom faced with a scene."

"The scene was of the Board's making. To save you further embarrassment, I herewith resign, Madame Vice-President. Frankly, I would be ashamed to admit I was a member of such a ruthless political organization." She left.

Power . . . Driving along the lake to fill her lungs with fresh, clean air, Nancy thought about the word and all its implications. It could have a foul meaning, it could have a beautiful meaning.

Home again. "What happened?" her mother asked.

"They went through with it."

"I hope you didn't do anything reckless?"

"I did the only thing possible. Then I resigned. You were wise to skip it."

"I couldn't quite believe it would happen."

"You know Mrs. Chancellor Burnham. Why couldn't you?"

"It seems incredible. The Women's Club has always been such a fine group."

"Mother, those dissenters felt they had no choice. They were trying to save their husbands' positions."

"We haven't heard the last of this, Nancy."

"Well, I've got to get to work. See you."

"By the way, Detroit called. Dr. Delavan. He's driving through here in a day or two. He had your note about that sculpture you're doing for the exhibition. He wants to discuss some answer you gave in the questionnaire. He's quite interested. He'll call when he gets to town and drop by. He wants to take a look at your eagle. My dear, you've interested the Director himself. I'd say that's quite significant."

"I'll have to work hard, maybe all night, if he's

coming that soon," groaned Nancy. But she was breathless with delight and excitement.

"Go ahead. It will help your nerves. You've been all on edge lately. What's the story, Nancy?"

Nancy blew her mother a kiss and went out to the studio. Solomon, his leg in a splint, limped to his feet to greet her. The sight of him there beside her bench brought thoughts to her mind that she wanted to dismiss. It was no use. She told herself she hated and would never forgive Joe Harrison as long as she lived. She told herself he was a boor and a beast and—

To prove it, she attacked the Eagle with hard purpose, working with all her energy, and achieved the effect she longed for. And yet, glancing down, the sight of that splint had its way with her, and the admixture of emotions was a prod, as if a whip were held over her shoulders. She was confused with herself and with life. . . .

What did you do when pressures became so great that you could not handle them? What did you do? She stood off and surveyed the sculptured bird and felt the kind of exultance the creative artist feels when he knows he has achieved some-

thing worthwhile. Still, the realization somehow left her cold after the first flow of passion had subsided. What did she want? What was the matter with her? Another day the thought of Dr. Delavan stopping by to take a look at her work would have sent her spirits soaring. Today, somehow, she took it in stride. She missed the feeling of power that hate provided. It was a reality almost tangible.

The memory of the afternoon was still vivid. Hate, and its power. She had been disgusted with another's transgression, inspired by that deadly impulse. Wherein did they differ, she and the powerful matriarch of Channel City?

Chapter 7

It was after dinner when Mrs. Burnham was called to the telephone. She returned to the living room with a triumphant smile.

Julie Fuller looked up idly from the magazine she was fanning through. "Good news of some sort, I imagine. Meaning no disrespect, but you make me think of the cat that ate the canary."

"You couldn't have conceived a more appropriate simile, my dear." Rather than registering offense, Mrs. Burnham was radiant. And without

being questioned, she gave in detail the matter that pleased her—the blackballing of the candidates for the Women's Club. And added, "*That* will be something for the creatures at the Power Project to mull over!"

"You'd have made a good president." Julie yawned.

"Thank you, my dear. I have been president, locally, of all the important Clubs. But I presume you mean Washington. . . ." She almost purred in her delight at having achieved her purpose.

"When a person has power behind them, they can manage almost anything."

"Not quite. It takes a bit of ingenuity as well."

Julie sighed. "But a person like me, for instance—I have neither power nor ingenuity. I'm a petal on the current. I go along . . . things happen to me . . . I make the best of it."

"Poor child! I can't understand your parents' indifference to your welfare. To go trekking off to Europe and leaving you entirely on your own—"

"Oh, not quite. Mother's cousin—a sweet old thing—was supposed to hold the fort. But after a couple of weeks, for some reason, she decided to

go back to Peoria. I didn't protest. I knew from the first that it wouldn't work."

"And you don't know where to reach your parents?"

"No. . . ."

"Never mind. You're here now, and a little time here with me will straighten things out for you. I'll give a luncheon at the Club, and you'll meet some girls your own age." She shrugged. "I'll make plans soon. In the meantime—"

Julie slid to her feet, unable to subdue the overwhelming eagerness to escape this boredom. "In the meantime, would you mind too much if I went out for a while tonight—just to get some fresh air off the lake? It is so beautiful, that drive along the shore. I'm sort of—well, nervous. I'd just like to get out by myself for a while."

"By all means, my dear—and take the small car. I was looking forward to the television movie tonight. It sounds awfully good, and you've seemed to enjoy them."

"I have, of course. But tonight—somehow—I'm restless." She fled before more could be said.

The "small car" made it along Lake View

Drive and up along the shore at a pace it had never before experienced. Miles and miles, then back, and a cruise along the main and side streets of the town from where, at a distance, could be seen the neon sign of the Bar of Music. That looked interesting. Julie drew up nearby and went in. There was music, typical of such a place —typical noise, typical dancing and laughter— and an unoccupied table. She made her way to it, not unobserved. And in a matter of minutes the chair opposite was pulled back, and a handsome young fellow with a gleam in his eye was saying, "How about it?"

The waiter appearing at that moment took care of whatever answer might have been given. Soon glasses touched, and the evening was on. . . .

Somehow nature provides ways and means for one to gravitate to his own level, where he is comfortable, where he can be himself, where negatives do not exist.

He, it seemed, was a fellow named Dane, a member of the crew at the Power Project. Julie made up a likely story about herself. They danced and laughed and sang with the others, and kept

the waiter busy. And some hours later, the small car came into the picture again, and with Dane at the wheel, went whizzing up along the shore, and whizzed and whizzed and swerved, suddenly, to avoid one that was passing another, and the inevitable happened.

At the hospital, identification was difficult for the girl, whose purse still had to be found. Dane was able to speak for himself, just barely.

Mrs. Chancellor Burnham, in the meantime, was frightened—yet more angry than frightened. It was after two o'clock! An hour that, in her life, happened only in the afternoon. She could call the police, of course. Yet to admit involvement in something that might prove embarrassing made her delay. So she waited.

Then the waiting ended with the ring of the doorbell, and the police had taken it out of her hands.

There were the brisk, brief questions, the agonizing realization on learning what had happened and how it had happened. First of all, she thought of the press. They must not print this. They *must*

not! She could give no answer to the background of the girl except what she had been told.

Then came the insistence that she go through the girl's effects. An imposing Connecticut address was found, a name, a number, and the police were on the telephone immediately.

There was an answer eventually. Mrs. Fuller, who was annoyed at being awakened at such an hour, strangely enough exhibited a curious indifference to the whole affair. For it seemed that Julie was her stepdaughter. And the father—well, he lived at a club in New York City—which she identified—and could be reached there.

The picture was clear. Delinquency: the answer to a broken home, to indifference, to authority; the fruitless, pathetic search for identity, for a life of her own, perhaps for love, reaching for it the best way she knew how.

Dr. Winters attended the victim. He came home about four, weary beyond words. Nancy, troubled about him, had curled up on the davenport in the library. She made fresh coffee and set the brandy cruet on the tray.

"Too tired to tell me about it, Father?"

He was brief.

"Who is the girl? Will she make it?"

"Probably. But what is there for her in life? What is she returning to, poor child!" Then he told the story as he had heard it.

Chapter 8

Mrs. Chancellor Burnham had seen to it that the story of Julie Fuller's broken engagement to Joe Harrison had been spread abroad. Now Nancy found herself wondering how much of it was true. And her tendency to doubt such a thing irritated her. Hate had come easily once Bert Lowry had given it motivation. Then the incident at the Club, and Big Joe Harrison's cutting retort to her attack, encouraged her to arrive at a destructive conclusion. It was like living through

endless cloudy days, never with sunshine, never with warmth, never with love.

She had yielded to its power, told herself she was enjoying the satisfaction it gave. But it was a climate to which somehow she could not accustom herself. Yet it had substance, even if negative. And she tried to convince herself that it was justified.

With evening on the following day, she made her way down to the beach and her favorite spot on the rocks. Solomon, always at her heels, was still recovering. She missed him. Nothing in life seemed the same any more. The whole picture had changed. She was alone and lonely, and not at home with herself. She was living with a stranger, and one she didn't particularly like.

The wash of the waves on the sand beyond made soft music, and the ripples played in counterpoint against the rocks. One by one the stars came out. And hate, like some dark ghost, crept away, and in its place came a mood of peace. And for some strange reason, she was remembering the expression in Joe Harrison's eyes that day in the office when Mrs. Chancellor Burnham had identified the creator of the dolphin sculpture. How

ridiculous—to remember a moment like that! Whatever brought it to her mind? And yet—she had to face it—the memory of that moment had recurred to her more than once. Life was a funny thing. The mind played tricks, plucking out an incident here and there to swell on briefly and then discard. Or was it that she craved approval, response? Certainly not from such a boor as—

And then she was aware of someone approaching along the sands, which was not unusual. Their neighbor, Nat Simonson, frequently strolled along the beach on a nice evening, playing his flashlight occasionally in case of possible obstruction. It was an area that natives frequented to be alone with themselves at evening. It was a place of peace.

Now, as the figure came nearer, Nancy heard him whistling softly a familiar current song, "Is That All There Is?" She moved, and some pebbles slipped from their place beside her, and the passerby paused. Big Joe Harrison!

"Nice night."

"It's spring," she heard herself say.

"Right."

"Peggy Lee sings that number. It's—haunting."

"Yeah. She's good. . . . Mind if I sit down for a minute?"

"The beach is public domain."

"How's your dog?"

"Still out of circulation."

"Kind of miss him, don't you?"

"I guess I have you to thank that he's still alive."

"Oh, someone would have found him."

"Thanks, anyway." What ghost was at her shoulder, prompting her to be civil?

Silence. . . .

Off in the distance, the bright lights of the great cranes at the Project seemed a theatrical background for this almost theatrical scene. It was one of those phenomena that happen to people for which there is no accounting.

Now he was saying, "You know, one time when I was a kid, my father took me fishing for a couple of days. I remember we sat on the banks of a trout stream. It was an evening like this. Kind of—strange. It got to you. He used to whistle, always whistling. Soft like— He was a great guy."

"Was?"

"Yeah. He was killed when I was just a kid. Construction work—like this." He gestured toward the bright lights. "I—I always remember—in the spring—" He cleared his throat.

They were silent again for a while.

Then something made her say, because she had to know, "Too bad about that accident, wasn't it? The Fuller girl. She's quite beautiful."

"Sure is. She's got the face of an angel."

He was right—and after all, that situation was none of her business. But she winced at his words.

"She is, basically," he went on. "She's trying to make it on her own, and she's just a kid—practically. Too much money, no home life, no authority in it anywhere. She's going along with the crowd. She wants to belong somewhere—to someone. That's about it. There's no discipline to guide her. A stepmother who couldn't care less what happens to her, and a father who's a spoiled playboy. Too much money, too much freedom, nothing to hang on to. It's a lousy world to be turned loose in."

There was no resentment, no bitterness, no passion in his voice—curiously. That scene in her

father's office didn't quite match this. Nancy was puzzled.

"Life is all a matter of perspective," Joe was saying now. "You lose it, and things go haywire. You buy a situation, and it's a phony. You're stuck with it, and you go through all the motions. That's where perspective comes in—let it alone and it comes your way eventually."

"You've lost me."

"I'm not so sure." He was blunt, looking sideways at her. "After that little drama in your father's office."

"Oh, that—"

"Yes, that. You got a picture of the Big Bad Wolf and Little Red Riding Hood. It went off smooth enough to have been rehearsed. I walked right in with both feet and said all the lines the situation indicated. Perspective had no part in it. That came later. I'm not likely to let it go again."

"In other words, you were taken, and you were bitter, but the so-called right guy doesn't walk out on an engagement and—"

"Wait a minute. What do you mean—engagement?"

"Well, that seems to be the story, according to

the authority on the latest gossip, Mrs. Chancellor Burnham. Miss Fuller is her house guest, you know."

Instead of reacting with fury, Joe only smiled and shook his head. "It figures. You know, Julie is a nice kid. She's fun—she gets to you. But not when it comes to promises—*uh-uh!* Not *that* far. You know, I guess it's par for the course. You fall, and when you pick yourself up, your face is red, but your mind has begun to function again. And you realize it was one of those things that happen to everyone as life goes along."

Familiar thoughts, couched a bit differently, but bearing the same philosophy as her father's. Just as he had said that night in discussing Bert Lowry and her idiotic passion for him. Just as he had said. At least Joe Harrison was big enough to admit the truth, even to a so-called enemy.

"You mean perspective goes out the window?" It was half-question, half-realization.

"You've got it. No one can blame her for anything she does—once you take a look at the whole picture. She has several strikes on her. Poor kid, I'm really sorry for her."

"Apparently you've stopped being sorry for *you*."

"Right." He got to his feet. "Good night." Then he turned and looked down at her and sort of smiled. "By the way, you sure knew what you were doing when you made that dolphin. So long —" And he was gone, whistling softly, "Is That All There Is?"

Her father looked up when she came in a bit later. "Where's your mother?"

"She's playing bridge at the Nicholses'. When did you get back?"

"Just a little while ago. I looked around for you. I knew you'd come up from the rocks before long. Somehow, with the Project on and strangers all around, I don't quite like the idea of your sitting down there alone, especially with Solomon out of circulation."

"Don't be silly." She shrugged. "Nothing ever happens down there." *Nothing ever happens down there. . . .*

"Quite a little excitement tonight at the hospital. The Fuller girl's father flew in from New York."

"How is she?"

"Better. Slight concussion and some stitches. She'll be able to travel in a couple of days. He's impatient and unreasonable. The fellow who was with her didn't come off quite so well. Some young scamp from the Project. A drifter, I gathered."

"Did you see Mrs. Burnham?"

"No. But she called me. She was in a state of collapse. Is her face red! She's been up to no good lately, making a lot of trouble. You know *that* story. Now she'll have some headlines to mull over. She won't talk the press out of that one, I'll bet. She's antagonized that sheet plenty; now it's their turn. I told her she could see the Fuller girl tomorrow and could meet the father at the hospital. She said she had no intention of visiting the hospital and no desire to meet the father—and hung up."

"Well, *I'll* visit the hospital," Nancy decided, though her father had no idea what inspired the thought.

He said, "Good girl! I like that spirit, Nancy. You know, there's something pathetic, almost

childish about that girl. She's too beautiful for her own good."

"Yes, she's beautiful. . . ."

"Oh, by the way," her father was saying, "I just got home when the phone rang. It was Lute Belknap. He wanted to know if he could come over and bring his banjo. According to him, you sort of go for that rock stuff—or something."

Lute! "Good! What did you say?"

"Just that you weren't around. He said he'd call tomorrow."

"I'd like that." Somehow everything seemed so right tonight—just the way you wanted it. . . .

"I thought you would. As I recall, once you went to war for him." There was a twinkle in his eye.

Chapter 9

Nancy hadn't seen Lute in some days, but that was not unusual. They enjoyed that sort of friendship. She was pleased that he had telephoned. He was good company, and he played the banjo like a professional. To her knowledge he wasn't tied up with any of the local girls, though there had been a rumor that he sort of went for the daughter of the construction superintendent at the Project. But just a rumor. She had never seen them together.

"You should always wear that color," was his

greeting. "It's neither red nor orange. What is it?"

"One of those indefinite shades. I like the indefinite."

"That's not the way I heard it, that night at the Club." He grinned.

"That little scene never made my calendar." She shrugged.

"There's a red circle around the date on mine."

"No doubt. How did you make out with the infamous Eagle? I've often wondered."

"Big Joe had a point." Lute was serious now. "And I had that round coming."

"He didn't need to put on that show, however," she flamed. "Flaunting his power. Here we were, peaceful among the hills beside the lake, and now the whole area is contaminated with power—thanks to the invasion. And our whole world is changed—not only the picture itself, but the people. It's made strangers of the familiar. It's bred hate and resentment, like a cipher on an organ . . ."

For a while Lute was silent, and she respected his mood because she knew that evening had left a scar. The incident had gone deep.

He was saying, "You speak of power. Did you

ever stop to think of all the kinds of power there are in the world? They crawl out, one by one, when the occasion arises. Take yourself, for instance—"

"Well, go on!"

"You hate Big Joe. You showed it that night. I suppose you still do, but he's a right guy. Play fair with him, and there's no trouble."

"You must be kidding!"

"You don't know the story, but I was responsible for that whole deal that night. I committed the cardinal sin. I got careless on the job, and he came through like dynamite. He's got a wild temper, and nothing sets him off like a fellow getting hurt on the job—especially through some guy's mistake. Yes, there's real power—I'll admit it."

"Good for you! And I suppose you consider him a real gentleman. He gave a most convincing performance."

"He gave you what you asked for, Nancy."

"You've really got heart, haven't you—after I put on the gloves in your behalf!"

"Let's leave that there for a minute. Speaking of power, it's all over the place. Joe showed only one facet of it that night. I used to be jealous as

anything over a girl, and I never see her any more. But *there* was power. It took over. I couldn't handle it. . . . Politics, religion—look around you. There's power in action everywhere. The little people and the big people—"

"Wait a minute, Lute. We've gotten into a grim mood. What about a little music?" Nancy hadn't realized there was this side to his nature. It was evident that the discussion had plumbed depths where he was inclined to linger.

"You started this, remember?" He lit a cigarette, and she brought cool drinks but made no attempt to divert him from this mood.

They sat briefly in silence and found it good to think, to talk out the thoughts rather than to eternally indulge in shallow dialogue that had no substance.

Presently Nancy said, "Well, since the subject of power has taken over the stage, tell me this: how did these big electric companies choose our quiet, isolated Lake Mohican shore for probably one of the biggest power projects of the kind in the country—if not the world? It's changed the lives of so many people."

"This is not the only spot in the country that's

protesting the destruction of their beautiful scenery. It's general. You haven't looked beyond the surface. Most people don't. They want their air conditioners, all their electrical appliances, and their scenery as well. They want to flip a switch and have it respond. They never stop to think of what adds up to that switch."

"Tell me more." And at his grim expression of what probably seemed flippancy, "I'm not trying to be funny," she insisted. "I'd really like to know what it's all about. Maybe then I can accept it intelligently."

"It's strange," he mused aloud. "There's this constant outcry about air pollution, but it takes fuel to create electricity—whether it's coal, or thermal, or pumped water storage. In the cities, fossil-fuel plants push sulphur-dioxide contamination to the danger point. The public in general has remained complacent about the subtle effects of low-level, long-lasting air pollution—and as a result has faced rising mortality in diseases."

"Father should be in on this."

"We've had some talks, he and I, but you're up against another kind of power there. I don't need to identify it. People don't want to give up their

conveniences, nor does big business want them to. Nuclear plants raise questions in the mind of the public on thermal pollution and possible radiation accidents. All of the alternatives have drawbacks. That means that some rough scales must be used to balance the various dangers."

"And we're supposed to absorb the so-called fringe benefits!"

"Oh, you're not the only ones. In New York, Consolidated Edison proposed to build a pumped storage plant at Storm King Mountain on the Hudson River. Just like here, for instance, water would be pumped into an upper-level reservoir with surplus power during slack periods, and then released through giant penstocks to generate power during peak-use periods. They'd create a pool with other users and serve areas in need. But objections came—and how!"

"Why?"

"Scenic considerations, just as we met with here."

"But you people took over here—notwithstanding."

"Well, we're utility, not industry. And when ninety per cent of the landowners are willing to

relinquish their property, the other ten per cent have no choice."

"So that's it! And the Burnham property was in the other ten."

"Right. And it was massive. We needed it. We had to have it."

"I think that was the first time Mrs. Chancellor Burnham ever had to surrender. It's made her a pillar of hate."

"But I'll bet she has an air-conditioning unit in her house, and appliances, just like you."

"Touche." These angles had never occurred to her.

"The environmentalists won in New York, but just the same, that pumped storage plant would be the answer, as it is here. This plant will help supply contiguous states. Between the growth of population and the long, hot summers, if a utility runs into a temporary power shortage, it normally can purchase or borrow power from adjoining systems in one of the twenty-two pools that tie the nation's electric utilities together. But during a heat wave, all systems in a pool may be taxed near, up to, or beyond their limits, and may not be able to help their neighbors."

"I always thought coal was the big answer. How come?"

"Well, there's a coal shortage. The United States Bureau of Mines' stricter standards have resulted in reduced production. Salute Progress!"

"I'd like to ask you something. By any chance are our natural reserves running out? Is that one of the quiet reasons these arguments against using coal persists?"

"Hardly! There's an estimated thousand-year reserve underground. Coal is the nation's most abundant energy source. But for the last few years consumption has been exceeding production. That's due, of course, to the new Federal Coal Mine Health and Safety Act. Some mines close rather than comply with stricter standards—and there's always the labor problem."

"So the big bad wolf is pollution?"

"Right."

She was seeing Lute Belknap and these Project people with different eyes. She was seeing the Pumped Storage Project that had devastated their scenic paradise as a rescuing angel. Lute Belknap's heart was in his work here, but the playboy sometimes dominated the worker. Not so

with Big Joe Harrison. He came striding into her mind, purposeful, indifferent to everything but the Project, his work, and the safety of his men.

"Don't let it get you down." Lute rose and ran a few chords on his banjo. "Want to give me a hand at the keys? I'd like to try out a couple of numbers."

She studied him for a moment. "You know, you're a man of many faces. I thought you worked essentially for a big salary. It hadn't occurred to me that you really felt this thing you were doing. You know, there was real passion in your voice when you gave me that rundown. I can almost forgive the Project for what they've done to our shore."

"Just try a little harder." He smiled tolerantly. "You'll make it."

They went from number to number. It was pleasant, an oasis that music always provides.

The telephone rang; daily routine took over again.

"I suppose Father is at the hospital—oh, no, he and Mother were invited to the Crimminses'. I wonder. . . ." Nancy picked up the receiver.

A vaguely familiar voice asked, "Is Belknap there? Would you put him on?"

Recognition now. The Eagle. Joe Harrison's voice wasn't exactly run-of-mill. There was something way back in it, like a tuning fork creating vibrations.

As Lute left the telephone—"How did he know you were here?" she asked impulsively.

"I told him where I'd be. There's a job we're concerned about. We want to keep in touch. He had to show up at some local doings. Your local tycoon, Crimmins, is putting on a bash. I have a hunch it's a screen, with business behind it. Joe is no genius at public relations, but he's brilliant in his field. He knows the answers."

"You know, somehow I got the idea he was checking up on you."

"Watch that imagination, Sister."

"I can't imagine him being an asset at a party."

"You might be surprised. If you knew him, you'd think he was regular."

"You choose your friends—I'll choose mine!"

He was silent, and as she looked up she interpreted his expression as a challenge he had not voiced. But these days she realized that her imagi-

nation was running wild. "You'd love to make the obvious answer to that one." She was bitter now. "Such as, 'You didn't do such a swell job with a fellow named Lowry.' "

"No, not particularly. Only I don't like to see a right character like you nurse hate. Because that's it, isn't it?"

"There must be a better subject than this."

"He asked about your dog tonight," he told her.

"You can see for yourself." She gestured toward the big pillow on the floor beyond where Solomon lay. She spoke to him, and the beautiful fringed tail responded. But a little more time had to pass before his complete recovery.

She was filled with confusion. She had been trying to create a smoke screen to mislead Lute, and it hadn't come off. She did not know herself these days. She lived in a limbo of uncertainty.

"Joe has a complex," Lute went on, tenderly regarding Solomon. "A wounded animal, or a fellow hurt in an accident on the job, and he goes haywire."

She let it pass.

He went on. "Say, how about it? I don't know

where I got the story, but I heard you were entering a piece of sculpture at the Baldwin Galleries exhibit next month in Detroit. Tell me about it."

She sprang up, grateful for the suggestion, for anything to get their talk into safer channels. "Better still—come and see it." She led the way out to her studio.

"Phew! Man—that's really something!" He stood back, appraising the great sculptured bird. "*An eagle.*" Then he turned sharply to look at her. "You got rid of a lot of hate on that one, I'd say. Do you really hate Big Joe that much?"

"Don't be ridiculous!" But she avoided his eyes.

"Who's ridiculous?" The tone was significant. "What are you calling the thing?"

"Dark Power."

"I'll say it's dark. Look at those eyes, they're weapons in themselves. And the braced talons—and the attitude, just before it strikes for its prey. . . . It's magnificent—and it's terrible."

"What do you mean—terrible?" Nancy flared.

"I think I mean this business of power. Look

what happens when it takes over. When you worked on that bird, all the passion you were capable of went into its creation. The passion of hate—no, not all. You hung on to a goodly portion. By the way, did you feel better when it was done?"

The moment of truth.

"How *did* you feel, Nancy?"

"I—I don't know exactly." Then she hurried to add, "Of course, it isn't finished. It has to go through more processes—"

"Did you feel proud?" he pursued.

There was no answer.

"Happy? At peace with yourself?"

"You know, Lute, to look at you, one would never suspect that you took time out now and then to analyze and consider."

"Yeah, I heard that one before, from the same guy you were thinking of when you beat your hate into that clay. Don't you ever forgive? There's a prayer that goes—"

"I know how it goes." Her voice was unsteady.

"Nobody trespassed against you. You started it, remember?"

"You're a strange combination, Lute. On the surface, you're Playboy Number One—with never a serious thought in your head."

"I've been told that before, too. So you're exhibiting this masterpiece!"

Immediately she was on the defensive. "You may be interested to know that Dr. Delavan—Director of the Art Association—is driving north in a few days. He telephoned that he'll drop by to have a look at my piece. From what I wrote in filling out the questionnaire, he feels it has possibilities. I've studied with him, you know."

"Interesting! What's the loot if it wins?"

"Enough." She smiled in defiance at his tone.

"More than thirty pieces of silver?"

"Just a minute!" she flamed. "I'm not betraying anyone!"

"No one but yourself, Nancy. . . . Well, I'd better hit the road. It's been quite an evening."

"Not run-of-mill for Banjo Boy." There was little mirth in her laughter.

"Ask me back. We'll try another tune, with words to fit the music." He brushed her cheek with a friendly kiss and was gone, tossing back over his shoulder, "We're friends, remember?"

Yes, she remembered. For almost two years, since he had been connected with the Project, they had enjoyed a true friendship, without romantic overtones, the rare experience that happens occasionally between a man and a woman. A false move, a silly impulse, could have destroyed it. It had survived.

Back in the house, she dropped to her knees beside the big pillow on the floor near her chair, laid her head against Solomon's soft coat, and reviewed the evening. She knew that Lute was right and she was wrong—but not big enough to admit it.

A little later she heard the car come up the drive. When she greeted her parents at the door, she had herself in hand again.

"How did it go? I suppose you walked off with the first prize, Mother, as usual."

Dr. Winters kicked off his shoes, tugged at black tie and collar, and dropped back in his special chair. "It wasn't one of those bridge contests," he yawned. "They really put on a show. When I realized what it was all about, I braced myself for a tiresome evening of chatter."

"Nonsense, Dick," his wife said. "It was a very

smart affair—with a purpose. And I guess you recognized that right away. When I saw the Elkinses there from New York, I knew it was big business behind the smoke screen of a party. And when Big Joe Harrison appeared, I was sure."

"Big Joe Harrison—" echoed Nancy involuntarily, and then remembered what Lute had said.

"Exactly." Her mother tossed off gloves and mink jacket and sat down wearily. "Would you be a lamb, Nancy, and fix some coffee? I think I need it."

"Make mine a Scotch," her father said over his shoulder. "I *know* I need it."

Nancy complied, but her mind wasn't on her work. And when she returned, they were discussing the affair and, in particular, a girl named Deborah Elkins and the charm of her voice and how well she sang in duet with Joe Harrison. And how they seemed to harmonize socially as well as vocally.

"Joe Harrison—*singing*?" Nancy set the tray down noisily, and her parents looked up, and she felt the penetrating gaze of her father.

"He has an interesting background." Her father reached for his glass. "I have reason to know.

He's pretty young to have achieved what he has. Kind of a prodigy, I guess you'd say."

"What's his role at the Project, Dick? Good coffee, by the way, Nancy."

"Resident engineer." He was addressing his wife, but it was obvious to Nancy that the words were for her. "You know, he could do worse than play up to that Elkins girl. She'd be a catch even if she weren't Roger Elkins' daughter. I kind of got the idea she went for Harrison. How did it strike you, Prue?"

"Well, I did think when he sang that solo, and sort of kept glancing at her, there was more to it than met the eye."

"What solo?" Nancy managed with an air of half-interest that didn't quite come off.

"Oh, you know." Her mother shrugged. "That thing Peggy Lee sings on television. Something about 'Is That All There Is?' He left right afterward." She laid down her cup, picked up jacket and gloves. "You two can sit here all night, if you like. I'm tired. These big social do's bore me to death."

"But the boy can sing, Prue, and you know it. That thing sort of got to me. It isn't just one of

those new rock distortions. It had meat on its bones."

She shrugged. "Good night," she said, and made her way up the stairs.

Nancy sat in the shadows, silent. She could think of nothing to say. The long-established rapport between her and her father might never have been. She was empty of thought, but thought and feeling are two different things. . . .

She stirred when he asked, "How did you make out with Belknap? Come here—come over here where I can see you."

She took up her familiar spot on the big hassock at his feet. "Lute brought his banjo. Do I need to go into it further?"

"You didn't give the impression of someone full of laughter and good cheer when we showed up."

"Music puts you in a mood." It was lame. It didn't serve, and she knew it.

Presently he said, "I had a few words with Harrison myself tonight. We've got a problem to discuss. No time or place to talk, so I suggested that he drop by tomorrow evening. He said he wasn't busy."

"You *didn't*!"

"Well, you don't have to be around if you don't want to. Though I just remembered; your mother is going to that duplicate thing at the Inn, and we'll need someone to stand by for refreshments."

"You could keep Minnie on for the evening."

"I could, but I won't."

"Father, why are you getting to be so difficult?"

"I don't know. Old age, I suppose. I'll be fifty next week, remember?" He grinned.

"I've had it," she said abruptly. "This has been a day." She dropped down to pat Solomon for a moment, then dashed upstairs.

And the sound of the waves on the lake shore echoed the sound of a voice she had heard tonight over the telephone, and it echoed and re-echoed to the farthest limits of her consciousness. And the moon had sunk low over the lake before at last she slept.

But it was a light and restless sleep. She kept hearing her passionate denial to Lute: "I'm not betraying anyone!" And she heard Lute's quiet retort, "No one but yourself, Nancy. . . ."

Lute had a right to be furious with the Eagle, every right in the world after that outburst before

the crowd at the Club. And yet he had taken it in stride, measured it with the yardstick of understanding, and denied himself the shallow luxury of resentment. They were probably together now, those two; Joe Harrison and Lute. She understood they occupied small suites in the old Chancellor Burnham mansion. Great Western had moved it to a reasonable distance from the upper reservoir and converted it into living quarters for its single officials.

How could Lute defend him after that incredible scene? How could he try to understand that flaming, ruthless nature—how? How could he carry on a friendship, absorb insult? Right now were they comparing their evening over a nightcap? Was Joe Harrison going on about the Crimminses' party and the Elkins girl—who had all that charm and who had sung a duet with him? And the solo "Is That All There Is?" Hadn't he been whistling that the night he stopped to chat beside the rocks? Was that his philosophy? Served him right!

Chapter 10

As a matter of fact, rather than go on about his own evening, the Eagle seemed more interested in Lute's. And Lute sat with a kind of half-smile and a look of quiet amusement in his eyes. It was the look of one who had stumbled on an incredible fact. Big Joe had Nancy Winters on his mind. It was an evening of revelations.

"What did you say?" Lute asked idly, vaguely aware that Joe had been speaking.

"I asked you what you meant by 'interesting ac-

companiment.' Does that—that Winters girl play the piano?"

"She does more than that. She talks to it, and what comes out is—well, something else."

"Humph." Big Joe lit another cigarette. And waited. And Lute made him wait. The only way you could get Big Joe to talk was not to ask questions, not to seem interested in his.

But when the silence lengthened, Lute remarked idly, "That was quite a ball game at the Crimminses' tonight. One of the fellows said they were throwing it for this big-time operator from New York. Looks like you're right in there with the local jet set."

"Did you know she was a sculptress?" Big Joe apparently had not heard a word.

"Who?"

"Who do you suppose? Who have we been talking about?"

"I don't know who *you* were talking about. *I* was talking about that Crimmins show—and the nobility from New York and—"

"Oh, cool it!" Big Joe slammed out of the chair, got himself a drink, and slammed back again.

"Oh, yeah, now I remember," Lute yielded. "You mentioned the sculptress. I guess Nancy is talented, all right. How did you know she was a sculptress?"

"Some of her stuff is in her father's office. I saw it there. A dolphin."

"Yeah. She's quite a gal."

"You seem to know her pretty well."

"I met her right after I came on the job here—through her father. We're friends."

"You don't say!"

Lute moved along. He had learned quite a bit in those few words. It didn't seem possible, but Big Joe was hooked. And from where he sat, Lute felt the guy didn't have a prayer.

"By the way"—Big Joe began to pace about, restless as usual—"I'm troubled. I just heard tonight that the Osbornes and the Wilsons are moving. They're selling the houses they bought here."

"Mike and Les?" Lute was alerted. "Those guys are indispensable."

"I mean their families. They're moving south to Sunset Cove."

"No kiddin'. I had an idea they liked it here."

"They did—until their wives were blackballed

as candidates for membership in the local Women's Club."

"That may be just the beginning. I'd sure hate to see those fellows pull out. We need them. And you can't tell—after all, their wives have pride, and they could put on the pressure with Mike and Les. Any construction company would welcome them. . . . That blackball business, it sure was a deal," groaned Lute. "I thought it was just a lot of talk, until I heard some chatter today."

"Give," said Big Joe, and freshened his drink.

"Well, it's a long story and a dirty one. And you won't believe it, but now it looks as though it's on the level. This old Burnham dame has got it in for anything that has to do with the Project. She's loaded, as you know, and handles her money like Hitler handled Germany. She has the controlling stock in some industries here in town—and has ways and means of getting rid of a couple of top officials if they don't play ball. She's done it before. Somehow she got through to the wives of a couple of them who are on the Board of the Women's Club—and you've heard the rest. I understand Mike and Les were ready to ditch the Project and

ask for reassignment. That's one of the reasons Elkins came out from New York. It fits. . . ."

"Mrs. Millionbucks Burnham must have a lot of friends."

"She doesn't need them, apparently. She has her hates to keep her warm."

"There'll come a day—" Big Joe yawned. "Guess I'll hit the sack. Tough day ahead, and I'm tied up in the evening."

"The social life around here is killing you. Better watch it. Popularity is murder."

"Social life, nothing. Doc Winters wants to talk over that Milgrim affair with me tomorrow evening. We couldn't get anywhere at the Crimmins deal tonight—chatter, chatter, chatter—"

"I know exactly what you mean."

But Big Joe was already in the hall and failed to see the significant grin.

Nancy made up her mind that she would not appear during the evening. Solomon, his leg still in a splint, was able to limp about, and followed her wherever she went. And tonight she went down to the foot of the garden to the spot above

the rocks on the shore and sat there watching the sun go down. And thinking, thinking, with the shaggy head on her lap. And the wind was from the west, and the sounds of the rippling water along the beach sang the song she had listened to all her life. And there was a feeling of peace in the sweet June air, the fragrance of growing things along the ridge.

And as she watched, a figure strolled along, which was always the case on an early summer evening. And she watched the figure and heard the quietly whistled song. It was all complete and usual. When the sound of tires on the drive would come, she would take Solomon in the back way. He had seemed better today and desperately eager to be with her.

Then suddenly Solomon got to his feet, bristling, not with a growl, but with the kind of joyous sound he made that meant anticipation.

"What is it, Solly?" Nancy bent to smooth his coat and put a protective arm around him. "Darling, you'll be all well real soon, and we'll take walks along the shore and you'll run and retrieve. Oh, my darling Solly, if anything had happened

to you that night—" She buried her face in his coat, and so she did not see the figure climbing up above the rocks; nor was she aware of a presence until Solomon limped away from her embrace and she looked up to see Big Joe Harrison leaning down to stroke the golden coat.

"I didn't mean to startle you," he said. "As a matter of fact, it is such a fine evening that I enjoy strolling along the shore. It's only a couple of miles. You can always drive."

No words seemed able to make their way through her confusion.

"I guess he remembers me." He stroked Solomon, now leaning tight against him, the beautiful brush swaying in the evening wind.

"He should. He's trying to thank you," she managed to say.

"I knew he'd make it. He's got good stuff in him. How about it, old man? When you get that contraption off your leg, you'll be as good as new."

Solomon's ecstasy brought tears to her eyes. "I'll always be grateful, you may be sure. Come, Solly. We'll take Father's guest inside. . . ."

Later her father came to her in the little room her mother called the cardroom, where she sat with a book on her lap. But she was not reading.

"How about some coffee, Nancy?"

"Oh, yes—I'll be right out."

"Do you know, Solomon hasn't moved from beside Harrison's feet since he got here."

"That's like Solly, he's all heart." She hurried past him. She wasn't sure of her voice or herself.

There were compliments, for it was excellent coffee. Small talk. A story or two. Then her father was saying, "Give us a little Chopin, will you, Nancy? Just to polish off the evening. Joe and I have been discussing some rough subjects."

She wished he hadn't asked for that, but there was no way out. It was the last thing she wanted to hear tonight. She was conscious every moment of that presence.

When he had gone, she felt she had to be alone again. "I won't wait up for Mother, if you don't mind. I'm very tired."

"Do you know something, Nancy? You never played as well—never. There was more feeling in it. It got me, even more than usual. I think it affected Harrison, too."

"Good night," she said over her shoulder, and hurried up the stairs.

"I wonder," he mused as she disappeared. "I wonder. . . ."

Chapter 11

Nancy was working in the studio a few days later when her father looked in. She called over her shoulder, "Sorry, Father. I won't have lunch today. I just got organized here."

"Nancy," he said quietly. "I thought you ought to know. Mr. Andrews died early this morning."

"Oh, no—" She turned swiftly, a hand at her lips.

"It's merciful. He would have been paralyzed for whatever time was left. . . . I've been thinking—you were always close to that family. I don't

believe they've been able to reach Audrey, though she could be on her way home. Her mother has made frantic efforts to get in touch. Why don't you drop over and see Allie Andrews? It might help. She's far from well."

Her first impulse was to cry out, "I can't—I won't—I just *can't*!" But first impulses usually spin off the surface. And somehow time had taken care of an old pain and humiliation, as time has a way of doing. And other elements had managed to dilute a concentrate that had once seemed impervious to any infusion.

It wasn't the familiar road she had taken a thousand times to the beautiful old Andrews house, with the drive winding through fragrant gardens and sweeping velvet lawns. The Power Project had taken care of that. Now the Andrews house was a simple cottage on a tree-sprinkled street that by no stretch of the imagination could be called beautiful. It wasn't fair! Mrs. Andrews was a dear and wonderful person. She had loved her flowers and shared them, and had made her home a place of beauty. So many happy days had

been spent in that house, now leveled and part of the upper reservoir of the big Project.

Nancy parked her car and considered her approach—what to say, what not to say, with the ghost of Audrey—a friend who had once seemed part of her—at her elbow.

There would be neighbors, the Andrewses' housekeeper to face. She had to keep up a front. She rang the bell.

The door opened. It wasn't possible—it couldn't be! But there stood Audrey—*Audrey Lowry*. But what had happened to the dancing eyes, the usual quick, warm smile of greeting? Even death, in the past, could never have affected them. Naturally, today there would be grief, solemnity, but not what Nancy saw in that face. Death alone had not achieved that. Something had happened to Audrey beyond the tragedy of the moment.

"Hello, Nan. Come in."

"I—your mother—I—" Nancy found herself babbling.

"It was good of you to come and see her. She's in her bedroom. You know where that is now?"

Yes, she knew. And she went to it alone, cheeks

as pallid as marble, and dropped to her knees beside the still figure sitting there whose expression was vague, her hands stiff in her lap. The words of greeting unspoken between them were more eloquent than any they could have said.

"If there's anything I can do—" Nancy managed at last.

"You have done it, my dear. . . ."

"If you need me—"

"I shall need your heart's—understanding. . . . Now she will need it more than I."

"Not *Audrey*!"

"Yes, Audrey."

"What do you mean?"

"Haven't her eyes told you?"

It wasn't possible, yet the implication was unmistakable. "I can't believe it."

"Neither could she. She has come home—to stay, Nancy."

She had heard of such things, had never quite believed or understood them. But this was today, when tradition and honor were laughed at, and anything went, and "So what?" was the current philosophy.

She found Audrey in the kitchen. Sitting alone at the kitchen table, she would remind one of a traveler in a railroad station waiting for a train to nowhere.

Nancy went over to her and touched her hand. "Oh, Audrey, what can I say? I'm—*sorry!*"

"So she told you." The voice wasn't Audrey's. Here was a stranger who had stepped out of the old image, a transition such as a television camera manages to achieve with trick photography. "You can do one thing. Cut the pity. I'd rather have a good, honest 'I told you so,' and have you laugh when you say it."

"We'll talk another time."

"Can you find your way out?"

"Good-bye, Audrey."

"I like that word. It's final. Clean, honest—" Already tears were crowding her eyes.

Nancy turned away to spare her. Once that friendship had practically been the dearest treasure in her life. She fought with her own tears as she wheeled down the drive.

Obsessed these days with the thought of power, she thought now of a line or two from Shelley:

The awful shadow of some unseen Power
Floats, tho' unseen, amongst us.

It had touched Audrey, almost destroyed her. Power had a price. One learned it the hard way. By getting what you wanted, you exercised power. But it carried a price tag. You could vent your anger and bitterness, for all the good it did. You found you had power, you exercised it, and paid for it.

Something like fear made Nancy's hands tremble on the wheel. She thought of the misuse of power, and, determined to get such thoughts out of her mind, turned for distraction to other things. There was a funeral now to consider. The Winters family would appear as a unit. Audrey would not be able to avoid attending, for perhaps her mother, ill as she was, would probably be ordered to rest. Unpleasant possibilities filled Nancy's mind as she drove up before the local florist shop to give her order.

There were others ahead of her, and one of them was Alta Newcombe. She made her way quietly toward Nancy.

"Perhaps you would know," she began softly,

"if Audrey made it in time." She spoke as the emissary. She was never quite able to dispel the impression that her missions embarrassed her. "Mrs. Burnham is deeply saddened at Mr. Andrews' death," she added. "They were good friends."

"Audrey is home," Nancy said bluntly, and tried to move away. But Alta, it seemed, was working toward other answers.

"Did her husband accompany her?"

"Why should you assume that I would know?" Nancy was curt.

"Forgive me," begged Alta unhappily. "Mrs. Burnham—well, she's interested in the Andrewses. And frankly, she's not well, not really herself. I try to humor her at such times. This new doctor she has turned to—I believe he has only aggravated her condition. She never got over the incident of that girl—you know, that Julie Fuller—and all the ugly publicity. The papers made so much of it. She was sick with embarrassment. And this young doctor, he doesn't have the patience to meet the situation. He doesn't understand her needs. I'm awfully worried."

Nancy was in no mood to temporize. "She did

what she wanted to do. Too bad it didn't work out."

"We all make mistakes. She needs your father, Nancy. I believe if your father telephoned her, she would—"

"That's likely!"

"Perhaps—perhaps you could—well—speak to him, make him try to understand—"

"Miss Newcombe, my father hasn't time to take on Mrs. Burnham's moods and hates."

"Would you suggest some approach that could —maybe—result in a resumption of his care of her?" Alta pursued unhappily, obviously desperate at the nature of her mission.

"Most certainly not! And now, if you will excuse me—"

"Dr. Winters is most understanding," Alta said softly, making a last try.

"I doubt if he'd take her on even if she *condescended* to call *him*." And the interview ended abruptly.

But that very evening the impossible occurred. Mrs. Chancellor Burnham telephoned Dr. Winters—the way having been paved by Alta

Newcombe, who had not adhered strictly to the truth.

"Dr. Winters, I have been quite ill. I have needed you."

"Really? I assumed you were finding satisfaction with your new man. I hear good reports of him."

"I'd like to know from whom!" More life in those words; the old aggressive, peremptory tone.

"Does it matter?"

"This is no time for small talk." Sharp, clipped words. "The point is, I want you to get over here tomorrow and pick up the pieces."

There was a pause.

"Surely you don't expect me to coax you?"

"I'm doubtful if I can fit you in."

"It would not be the first time you failed—if I may remind you."

"You may. . . . My day is crowded as it is. I have two special patients to check up on before they leave for their new homes down at Sunset Cove. Mrs. Osborne and Mrs. Wilson. They're the wives of two of the most important men at the Project."

"I'm fully aware of who they are, Doctor—and I'm not unaware of the implication."

"Good! So you see I cannot slight such important people—though you know how that is."

There was a long pause. "Well," snapped Mrs. Burnham, "what time shall I expect you?"

"Don't make any plans. If I find it possible, I'll give you a ring beforehand—but don't count on it."

"I'll hold the late afternoon open," she said now, not without a tremor in her voice.

He found himself pitying her—imagine pitying Mrs. Chancellor Burnham! And he thought, The higher you went, the harder the fall. . . .

It was after five the following day when he arrived at the Burnham home. Mrs. Burnham was disgruntled and showed it. Dr. Winters seemed not to notice. He examined her in silence. Her heartbeat was rapid, her blood pressure high, and her nerves in a state that offered no help to the situation.

"Get her to bed at once," he told Alta Newcombe, "and see that she stays there." He

wrote out two prescriptions. "Better get them filled right away."

"I have no intention of going to bed!" blazed Mrs. Burnham.

Dr. Winters returned his instruments to his bag and snapped it shut. "In that case, better get your other man back. I haven't time for this sort of thing."

"Dr. Winters, you're impossible! You never used to be so high and mighty."

"Good day." He shrugged and turned to leave.

"Alta!" she screamed. "Don't stand there looking so stupid. Do as he says." And she left her chair. "I'll see you in my bedroom in about five minutes, Dr. Winters." She was trembling uncontrollably as she made her way to the stairs.

At her bedside, he learned on demand the latest source of her outrage.

"—and, of course, you've seen the paper," she snapped.

"Glanced at it. What's the story?"

"I've always been a patron of the Community Concerts. My name led the list, naturally, because of substantial contributions. I am not even listed this year. They haven't even *called* me."

"And that's got your blood pressure up to around two hundred."

"You don't seem to understand!"

"No, I'm afraid I don't. And there's another matter I don't understand, one that's changed the lives of some very nice people."

"I don't know what you're talking about." But she avoided his eyes.

"I'm talking about the women you managed to have blackballed at the Women's Club recently."

"You've forgotten your place, Dr. Winters." It might have been a computer speaking.

"Where is my place, Mrs. Burnham?" he asked slowly. "With the rest of the puppets you control —with the dollar sign in your hand? You resent the power of the big utility Project that's invaded your territory. Yet you exercise a ruthless power of your own."

"I don't intend to listen to this—" But the life had gone out of the fury; the sword was down.

"I'll prescribe something else for you, Mrs. Burnham, which could be the most help of all. In your library is a set of Emerson. Run through his essays and check on what he has to say about the

law of compensation. It's something to think about." He picked up his bag. "Good luck!"

"Alta!" A hint of fear tinged the sharp cry now. "For heaven's sake, why do you stand there like an idiot? See the doctor out—and make an appointment for him here tomorrow."

Alta failed to move.

"Do you hear me?" Mrs. Burnham was screaming. "Go downstairs, you stupid creature, and do as I say—*at once*!"

Still Alta remained standing where she was.

Unable to grasp the unprecedented situation, Mrs. Burnham clenched the sheet with hands gripping tightly like an angry bird's talons. She was unable to speak.

"I am resigning—as of now." Alta's voice was a monotone with a hard core of purpose.

"*Resigning?* Don't be ridiculous! You have nothing. You are completely dependent on me, and you know it. Where will you turn? You have no talent, no profession. What will you have without me—and your place here?"

"My self-respect." And, oblivious to the cries and protests, Alta went down the hall to her room and closed the door firmly.

And now there was no one to see the look of loneliness and desolation on that mask that the public had long since assumed was incapable of expression.

Chapter 12

Dr. Delavan had arrived. The fact of his presence in Nancy's studio seemed fantastic. As a student, she had listened to his unforgettable lectures, meditated on his principles, and longed for his approval.

The past flashed through her mind—those early mornings when she sought the haven of her studio to yield to the emotional pressures that she could not control. The early morning sun glamorizing the disorder that, these days, she ignored; days when she would yank off the damp cloth that

covered the glob of clay on the pedestal, and after glaring at it for an instant, would find some release in attacking it savagely.

The sweeping motion would reveal the great spread of wings as she saw them in prospect. Then, snatching up her gouge tool, she would throw herself into the work of creation. And from the image in her mind, the once-naked armature took form, and the wings spread out before her. Then rapidly, with her gouge tool flashing in desperately eager fingers, the radiating feathers were indicated. And life seemed to flow into it as she placed the eyes that immediately glared back at her with hate. Instinct kept telling her the thing was *good*.

And so with the hate in her eyes answering the hate before her, she proceeded with the business of making the plaster model. Even now, in this important moment with Dr. Delavan there examining the Eagle, she found herself remembering when the liquid rubber covered the deadly claws, found herself watching in memory as it rose then in the protecting wall, covering the powerful wings and at last the hateful eyes, confusing the sequence of processes in the unbelievable confusion of the day. And then the day when it was

hard enough to cut apart and disclose the next stage toward completion. And she remembered thinking, Would the hate survive the process?

The sight of Dr. Delavan there beyond brought Nancy back sharply to the present. What was the matter with her? Was she permitting this unhealthy attitude to affect her mind? Those Art School lectures, listening to that genius who was now in her studio— Once some sixth sense had suggested that the gleam in his eye as he had studied her work expressed admiration. She had not known that Rodin was his god, but the great sculptor was hers as well. Not until Dr. Delavan had lectured on Rodin did she realize that here was more than the didactic discourse of a master. Here was a worshipper at a shrine.

She watched him now as he stood there in silence, a distinguished-looking individual, a figure suggesting emaciation rather than slenderness, a figure that might have served as a model for El Greco. His eyes shone with a curious brilliance, a spiritual fire. His face was gaunt and haunting. There always seemed to be a labored control in his passionate response to that which interested him.

Now he drew in his breath sharply as he stud-

ied the Eagle, but he said nothing for what seemed an age to Nancy. But she understood, because she knew him well.

"I see," he said presently, "that you were inspired by Rodin's *Study for the Defense*."

"No."

"Then what?" He glanced at her sharply.

"Hate," she admitted, and felt refreshed by the acknowledgment.

"Do I detect shame in your voice?"

"Is that important?"

He shrugged. "Hate is a natural passion, if not admirable. I would have hoped, however, that such a piece as this could emerge from a nobler impulse."

"If you are cold, does it matter what feeds the fire to warm you?"

The shadow of a smile played around the thin lips. He had a way of fixing one with those keen, penetrating eyes, but she did not flinch from his gaze.

He stood quite still, studying the sculpture in silence. He said presently, "You have remembered words of Rodin that I have given you. . . ." Now he was musing aloud. "The projec-

tion of the sheaths of muscles must be accentuated—the shortenings heightened, the holes made deeper. Sculpture is the art of the hole and the lump. . . . The ignorant, looking at this, may say, 'That is not finished.' Ignore them. There is no notion more false than that of finish, unless it be that of elegance. Art steps in to exaggerate certain planes and to give beautiful shadows that are opaque. . . ."

Nancy stood entranced, facing this incredible moment here in this humble cabin now glorified by his presence.

He did not move or speak, still absorbed by the piece of sculpture before him.

"Has it got a chance?" she had to ask.

He turned eventually. "Finish it," he said bluntly. "Exhibit it. Alexandra Kunsky didn't quite make perfection."

She couldn't quite believe the stunning implication of his words. *Alexandra Kunsky had won first prize at the exhibition last year.*

He left then, walked away through the garden without a word, without looking back. It was incredible—it couldn't have happened—she had won the highest accolade possible. And yet, deep

in her heart there was no triumph, no victory. For the fire that had stirred the inspiration had flickered and gone out. And her heart was cold and lonely, since she had shut the door to the warmth that could be. Her heart should have been soaring to the skies, yet her hands were leaden. And instead of attacking the work that waited, she sat there before the Eagle, still and aimless.

Her father found her there later. "You seem a bit down. Anything wrong?" And when he heard the staggering news, "Good girl! It's been worth it all, hasn't it? You knew what you wanted to do, and you fought for it. And now, with Delavan's encouragement and approval, you'll win the prize, Nancy. As the kids say, it's in the bag."

"You're an optimist, Father." But, as always, the loving communication between them had its usual effect.

"I'm the father of a celebrity—in embryo."

"Don't count your chickens—"

"I'm not a gambler, Nancy, but I'd lay it all on the line right now. You'll be the winner."

The winner. If only she could shake off this feeling of depression, of futility.

"I can understand this lethargy," he went on.

"It comes with shock. Nature compensates for such things, or the old ticker wouldn't be able to survive."

Solomon now put his paws on her knees as if in agreement. Would she ever look at him again without remembering that but for someone she despised, he might not be here? *Someone she despised.* Would that image eternally haunt her?

"This calls for a celebration," her father was saying. "I'm taking no calls this evening. We'll have dinner at the Club. That'll please your mother, too—perhaps impress her." He winked.

But unfortunately, there was an emergency call, and dinner at home alone with her mother had to substitute for the festivities her father had planned.

"Your father is a strange combination, Nancy," her mother sighed. "All that excitement he was going on about—Dr. Delavan's call and his approval."

Nancy looked up and regarded her mother thoughtfully. "You know, I've often wondered how you hold that even tempo no matter what happens. I think if the house were burning you'd stand there and comment, 'Too bad, isn't it?' "

"Now, just a minute. But I never can understand how people let themselves get so excited about anything that happens—well, just out of the ordinary routine. You're usually just like your father that way, only tonight he was carrying the torch and you've seemed almost lethargic. Don't you feel well?"

"I'm all right." She had scarcely touched her food.

"I expected you to race out to the studio, lock the door, and make a night of it with that ugly bird."

Now the chair was flung back. Nancy left the table. "That's exactly where I'm headed."

The challenge was responsible for the renewed energy, and she was still working on the Eagle when her watch reminded her that tomorrow was another day. After all, it was one o'clock in the morning.

She made her way into the house. A light had been left for her, the usual one beside her father's chair. But the chair was occupied, and her father stirred, looked up, and yawned. "I was about to come out and put an end to this nonsense. Do you have any idea what time it is?"

"Why aren't *you* in bed?"

"I just came in a little while ago."

"What happened?"

"Alta Newcombe was run down by some teenagers at the Garfield Crossing. Seems there were no brakes on the car."

"Oh, no! I thought she'd left town. Tell me!"

"It's bad. She's still unconscious."

"What is she doing here in Channel City, anyway? She was determined to go, I heard."

"She got a job baby-sitting. Took a room over on the south side. . . . It was on the radio tonight, if you'd been listening. Mrs. Chancellor Burnham heard it. She was on the job at the hospital, trying to run the show. I've never seen her like this before. Believe it or not, she has a heart under all those gold chains and lockets. Not just an organ that functions physically. It's connected with her tear ducts—and that was something to see."

"I can't believe it!"

"She's not in such good shape herself, as you know. But she was at the hospital shortly after the broadcast. Came storming in. I took over, but it wasn't easy. She kept saying, 'This is my business, not yours.' I reminded her of a few things, and she didn't have much reserve to keep battling. And

then all of a sudden she said, 'If she survives, I'll never let her out of my sight,' and paid no attention to the tears running down her cheeks."

"Alta will have something to say about that, I imagine."

"It was really quite an experience," the doctor recalled thoughtfully. "Mrs. Chancellor Burnham has really surrendered. Between sobs at last, she made an admission. 'I've missed her—she's part of my life. She knows me better than I know myself.' I tried to console her. I was concerned about her heart. But all she would say was, 'Save her, Doctor, save her.' "

"Can you?" Nancy wondered.

"It pretty much depends on Someone up above. . . . I have a feeling she'll come through; maybe it's just hope." He shrugged. "You know, it's strange the way things work out. A couple of weeks ago. Alta was just a pawn in the Burnham employ. Tonight that old gal would give everything she has if Alta survives. In her own peculiar way, she loves that girl. . . . Love—now, *there's* power for you."

"Good night," Nancy said abruptly, and made her way up the stairs.

Chapter 13

Dr. Winters made no secret of his pride in Nancy's achievement. In passing he confided the latest news to nurses, doctors, druggist, and particularly to some of the top brass at the Project. And among them was Lute Belknap, just back from Chicago on company business.

Engaged in conversation at the field house with Joe Harrison and Don Travers, assistant engineer, Lute turned to greet the doctor. Among his first questions was, "How's Nancy coming with that sculpture?"

He was given an immediate rundown on Dr. Delavan's visit, and the doctor received hearty applause.

"She has what it takes," Travers said. "She's loaded with talent. Besides sculpture, I heard her play recently. Neat."

"By the way, Doc," Lute said, "do you suppose she can take time enough tomorrow night for dinner? There's a shindig at the Jaycees', and they've got that Detroit combo we had last month."

"Give her a ring," suggested the doctor. "She's young—and human."

"You can say that again," agreed Lute. "Hold it, fellows. I'll take care of that right now."

Travers said, "I've never seen any of her stuff. I've heard it's good. It must be, from what you've just told us."

"It *is* good," Joe Harrison put in quietly. "That dolphin in your office. That's really something."

"Oh, yes." Dr. Winters looked thoughtful.

Now Lute was back. "I'm in luck. She'll go. Why don't you fellows take in some of the action?"

"I'm saving everything I've got for the 'big pour.' It's coming up in a day or two, as you know."

"Well, live it up in the meantime. Find yourselves a couple of gals and look in on the marathon. Good for the morale. And now I've got to swing around the reservoir this afternoon. Top orders. It's a good day, and, as it happens, I won't be alone. I mentioned it to Nancy, and she wants to have a look. So I'm on my way, boys. 'Bye, doc."

Lute drove Nancy around the Project, and she marveled at the magnificent undertaking that man had conceived to bring electric power to the immediate state and others. They called it Pumped Storage. They had built a coffer dam with great squares of stone that had required thirty-two freight cars for delivery. Thus Lake Mohican could be moved away from the immediate area where the powerhouse was being built, with a hundred feet of it below lake level.

"I'm so glad you brought me here today, Lute. You make it sound interesting, instead of just a

big nuisance and a blot on the landscape. I know that's the general attitude locally. But if people only realized what a miracle it is—"

"Do a little missionary work on the side." He grinned. "How about it?"

"No. On the level, Lute, I needed to see this—and to understand what's going on."

At the shoreline, he indicated the giant penstocks that would discharge water from the upper reservoir to the generators of the power plant and into Lake Mohican.

"It's incredible." Nancy left the car to stand and observe the impressive process under construction. Acres of long steel perpendicular rods, closely set, had been welded together. "It looks like a sea of steel lace. And those men that are checking the welding for the last time—they're going along as if it's the simplest thing in the world. They look like pygmies against that background."

"Don't worry. They know their business. Get in the car now, and I'll show you the last step. That's where the 'big pour' takes place. . . . There, now—that's the penstock area. That jumbo machine you see there near the reservoir

handles the concrete when the 'big pour' begins. That's the purpose of those steel rods. They'll support it indefinitely."

Nancy shivered. "By the way, how do they control it when the concrete begins to move?"

He grinned. "With intelligence—or else!"

"What do you mean?"

"One little slip, and—bingo! It's curtains for the guys running the show. They're always careful, but you never know. Anything can happen. This crew, though, is something."

"And that large family-size canister there—do you mean to say that's *filled* with concrete?"

"That's what I mean to say. When it's in action, there's a full opening at the bottom—and look out below!"

"Somehow, Lute, you make it sound a little . . . frightening.'

"Oh, come on! We're working to create power around here, remember, and power creates electricity."

"What you're trying to tell me, in your very diplomatic way, is that I make a scene when the refrigerator goes off and the TV fades."

"You, and the rest of the country." He drove

on, but they were silent then. The thought that they were close to something that could mean convenience for the public, and the danger of death to those who worked to provide it, was not conducive to light conversation.

It was different the next evening at the Jaycees' affair. Nancy and Lute had put behind them the grave possibilities that had occupied them at the Project, and the Detroit combo came through as Lute had promised.

Nancy wanted to ask a question, but it was no question to ask Lute. For Lute was in high form, and all seemed right with his world. But Nancy kept wondering, Is *he* coming, he and Don Travers? And was he bringing a girl, as Lute had suggested? If so, who?

Her gaze wandered around. There was no sight of him or Don, but—yes, there he was, alone, making for the terrace.

"How many times do I have to ask you a question?" Lute was saying.

"Can I help it if the music distracts me?"

"I'm not buying that. Ever since that French

guy from Detroit showed up and gave you a big hand on your sculpture, you've been different."

"Wouldn't you be?" she fenced, and felt the color rise in her face.

Fortunately, the combo took a break at that point. "I'm thirsty," she said, "and it's warm in here. I'll be on the terrace."

There were others with the same idea. Couples, and a stag or two. And in a moment one of the latter approached her.

"Nice night," Big Joe Harrison observed.

Through quivery laughter she managed to say, "From here the lights of the Project make you think of Coney Island."

"All the effects but none of the fun."

"Fun is where you find it."

"Yeah. I heard that somewhere."

Stupid dialogue, words that were masks, and poor ones at that. She was aware of the deadly chemistry between them. She had never known such a feeling before. Now its power had her in its grip.

The combo struck up again. Big Joe said, "How about it? Want to try this one?"

They passed Lute returning with drinks, unaware of it. And they danced. Neither spoke, yet there was communication in the tension of his hand over hers. . . .

Lute was a good sport. Afterward, he made a remark about being waylaid by some determined gal looking for a man.

"Don't boast." Nancy shouldn't have tried to laugh, because it didn't come off. For beyond, the Crimmins girl was making her way toward Joe Harrison.

Lute said, "Get a load of that. The Crimmins girl is growing up. Ever since the night of the party Joe went to at her house, she's been after him. Even parks her MG up at the Project—and takes over."

Nancy didn't sleep that night.

Chapter 14

The studio had become a haven. They thought Nancy was working at her exhibit, working feverishly after Dr. Delavan's call. It wasn't so. She had lost the fever to create, to improve—to work. The fountain of energy supplied by hate had run dry. Now there was no pressure, no desire, no goal.

Her mother had begun complaining. When Nancy failed to come in to lunch that day, and her father had not appeared for dinner, Mrs. Winters declared, "This is too much!" She served Nancy. "Now eat your dinner and stop acting like a

prima donna! I've had enough of it. You're going to be a little bit embarrassed if you don't win first prize—after this temperamental spree."

"What's keeping Father? He usually telephones."

"Oh, I suppose, since I never put on a scene, he takes it for granted I'll know he was *unavoidably detained*. But there's going to be a change around here. I've reached the—" The telephone interrupted her.

Nancy took it. "It's for you. Sounds like Mrs. Wickwire."

"Oh, that's right! I was supposed to call her about the Club meeting tomorrow."

A car was coming up the drive. Nancy went to meet her father. "You're in the doghouse, old dear," she greeted him. "Prepare yourself for a scene. Did you know it's after eight?"

He smiled feebly without speaking, walked past her into the house, tossed aside his hat and bag, and dropped into his chair. His face was drawn and white.

"Dad, what is it—what's wrong? You look sick."

He made a silencing gesture. "Just give me a minute. I've had it."

She waited.

Presently he said, "You haven't heard, then?"

"Heard what?"

"There's been an accident at the Project. A bad one. The 'big pour' started today. Joe Harrison and Travers were directing the process."

Her hands froze together as she waited.

"One of the fellows let a cable slip. Harrison managed to throw Travers out of the way, and got the impact of the edge of the concrete from above."

"Tell me—*was he*—"

"It's bad, Nancy, very bad."

"You mean he might—" She couldn't go on.

"He regained consciousness for a while. He recognized me. Game as hell, that fellow."

"*Tell me.* Will he—"

"I can't tell you. Only God knows. He mumbled a few words. No wonder they call him the Eagle. Just before he passed out again, I caught the word 'sculptress'—" And at the look on her face, he leaned forward and grasped her hand

hard. "You don't have to pretend with me, Baby. I know. I've known for some time."

"Will you please come in to dinner?" Mrs. Winters was demanding. "I'm getting a little tired of this hit-and-miss business—and Minnie off seeing her folks. Remember, I have a life to live, too. Mrs. Barclay is picking me up in a few minutes, and I can't default tonight. Martin Coburn is here from New York—bridge expert de luxe. I wouldn't miss it for anything."

Cooperation was managed in a silence that further annoyed the mistress of the house. Grimly she deserted the table and went to dress.

After the Barclay car drove away, Nancy managed to clear the table and was about to join her father in the library when the telephone rang.

Wearily he picked up his bag and hat. The tone of his voice was ominous. "Mrs. Andrews was very low today. This might be it."

When he had gone, Nancy switched off the house lights and went back through the garden to her studio. The darkness there was a refuge tonight. She could see that hospital room where the Eagle lay, probably dying—*dying*. She could hear him say the word 'sculptress' through labored

breathing. And she talked to God as she had never talked before. . . .

She needed no light to see the sculptured eagle there beyond, every inch of which she knew by heart. The Eagle, powerful and predatory, replica of an evil creature; one to fear, one to hate. With every pressure of her thumb she had hated Big Joe Harrison more. She had gloated over the result—she had gloated. . . .

Driven at last by a power greater than ambition or hate, Nancy lifted her sculptured masterpiece from the pedestal with a strength supplied by an agony of regret and shame. And she carried it through the dark garden to the spot at the end of the path and flung it down and heard it crash against the rocks below. . . .

The night was soft and warm. There was no moon, but a million stars looked down from a cloudless heaven. And the wash of the waves on the beach made soft music, tender music.

Unsteadily she made her way back to her dark refuge and closed the door. It was a time for thought, not hate; a time for truth, not evasion; a time to face the fact that one can love another more than oneself. . . .

At last she dozed, emotionally and physically exhausted.

Voices eventually roused her. She looked up to see her father in the doorway with Nat Simonson, their neighbor.

"Nancy—" Her father touched her hair as he always did in a gentle mood.

She looked up, confused, for Mr. Simonson was in an excited and voluble state, and his voice was harsh and piercing.

"Yup—that's the pedestal where the sculptured eagle stood. It's empty now, all right. Her mother showed it to me the other day when I dropped by. I wonder what else those vandals did—maybe they walked off with other stuff, your house being dark and all. It's about time something was done about vandalism in these parts! You can't blame the Project for everything that happens, but it does bring in a lot of drifters. I'm going to see the police about it. We need some protection around here. Why, that eagle was a fine piece of work! And that show in Detroit coming up—why, she'd have made the prize easy. It's incredible!"

Nancy met her father's eyes and saw that he understood.

"Nat," he said abruptly, "I'll handle it. Just leave it to me, please. You're a good neighbor. You can see she's in no condition to go into this tonight. Thanks a lot."

But Simonson still complained on his way to the door. "Like I told you, Doc, your place was all dark—just the setup for a thing like this. I was just strolling along the beach like I do now and then, playing my flashlight ahead. I couldn't believe my eyes when I saw that sculpture all smashed on the rocks. I just took the biggest pieces and put them at the side of your house. Look at that girl! She's still so stunned she can't speak. This is an outrage! Remember, if you need me—'

"We'll go into it later, Nat," Dr. Winters urged. "Now it's important to get Nancy to bed."

As the door closed, he said quietly, "Better get some rest, Nancy. It's been a long day." He took her hand and held it hard.

"You know."

He nodded. "Like the song says, Baby—with you, it's all the way. . . ."

Summer had come and gone, and the bronze of autumn prevailed. With Solomon at her feet

among the rocks below the garden's edge, Nancy gazed off across Lake Mohican to where a growing moon sketched silver paths—like life suggesting this road or that one, but no longer confusing the traveler whose heart had once been an unreliable compass.

Much had happened. Innumerable weeks of anguished suspense, prayer, and, at last, recovery. . .

Now Solomon got to his feet with a soft, happy whine and raced down the beach toward a figure that limped into view, whistling as he flung a pebble across the water. When the wind was from the west, you could hear a melody clearly. And the wind was from the west now.

He was whistling a song, not a new song that concerned itself with cynical questions, but an old song, old and tender as the night itself. A song of love.

Thine is the Power

MARY FRANCES DONER

It was early summer on Lake Mohican, and The Great Western Construction Company's Pumped Storage Project was in full swing. The purpose of the project was to provide better power resources and less pollution, but for the townspeople of Channel City, it only spelled disaster. Most of them had been uprooted from their homes and relocated, and opposition still raged vehemently.

Rage burned, too, in blonde Nancy Winters, but it was directed at Big Joe Harrison—"The Eagle"—the young and brilliant engineering expert in whom it seemed to Nancy that undue power was vested.

It is Nancy's wise father who understands her reaction to Big Joe and who enables her—before it it too late—to reassess the good that power can achieve.